

MEDITATIONS AND CONFERENCES

FOR A

RETREAT OF TEN DAYS,

ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT OF ST. FRANCIS DE
SALES AND ST. JANE DE CHANTAL.

FROM THE FRENCH OF ABBÉ DUQUESNE.

WITH AN APPENDIX, CONTAINING SUPPLEMENTARY MEDITA-
TIONS, THE RETREAT OF ST. JANE FRANCES
DE CHANTAL, AND SELECTIONS FROM
HER CONFERENCES.

Translated by the Sisters of the Visitation.

WITH THE APPROVAL OF
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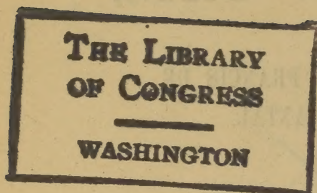
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PREFACE.

EVERY virtue has more or less attraction and power over our hearts according to the character and dispositions which govern us ; but humility and meekness have charms which no one can resist. The union of these two virtues so perfectly characterizes St. Francis de Sales, that it is impossible not to honor him, under these distinctive traits.

The meekness of his spirit and the humility of his heart, so opposed to the manners of our age, must, however, make greater among us, the veneration and love which was given him during life. Always, and justly appreciated by the greatest minds of that time, why has not this great saint, as dear to God as to men, been more imitated? This precious model is worthily retraced in the Order to which he has left his spirit as an inheritance. A spirit of humility which does not overcome by menaces, which does not invoke the fire of heavenly vengeance, as that of Elias, but which, like that of Jesus Christ, attracts by its influence, animates by promises, vivifies by consolations ; a spirit which, although one of meekness, does not form weak souls, but souls strong and generous in combat, because the weapons they use are the arrows of divine love.

It is to you, O cherished daughters of this tender Father, whom heaven has given you in mercy, to you, O beloved

children of a Mother, who, formed by the amiable lessons of this great master of the spiritual life, was the most perfect model of the virtues of your state, I dedicate this little work ; not to instruct you in the sublime lessons of perfection which both have given you ; but to animate you more and more in the love, zeal and fidelity, which you owe to the holy Rules, which the spirit of God has dictated to you through their ministry ; Rules full of wisdom, which the Holy See has recognized in the approbation it has given them, wherein all appears easy because all is smoothed by love and yet in which all leads to the highest perfection. Happy if, by these reflections, drawn from the writings of your holy founders, and which are as their spirit, I can assist you to reanimate yourselves in the way of salvation, and to become the glory and crown of him, who has traced out for you the road to sanctity, and of her, who has directed your first steps by walking with you in the path of the Just. May you by the faithful practice of these Meditations and Conferences, in which there is nothing new to you, where all is fitted to the state and refers to the Institute which you have chosen, may you be always the good odor of Jesus Christ and the ornament of His Church.

If I succeed in my purpose, to God alone be the glory forever and ever. *Amen.*

PLAN OF THE WORK.

THE Author of these Meditations having proposed to give, especially to the Religious of the Visitation of Holy Mary, a sort of treatise on the duties of their state, according to the spirit of their Institute, has thought he could not make use of a form more suitable, and more interesting for them, than that of a Retreat, for the reason that it is more particularly in those days which serve as a preparation for the renovation of their vows, that retired apart, they occupy themselves in learning, and scrutinizing, and strengthening themselves therein the way of sanctity.

To assist and sustain their fervor in these days of solitude, light and grace, the author has thought he should speak less to the mind than to the heart. With this view he has applied himself in the first point of the Meditation to instruct; and in the second to lead the soul to entertain herself with herself or with God, on the faults she recognizes in herself after the instruction received; on the means of repairing these faults, and on the resolutions conformed to her needs, that she ought to take.

He might have proposed (and certainly it would have been easier) to give only simple subjects of Meditation; but considerations of this kind to which many authors

limit themselves, being too unconnected, and little fitted to convince the mind or touch the heart, would not have fulfilled his project. Besides, persuaded as he is, by his own experience, that it is not enough to make a profession of piety to learn the art of meditating, he has given meditations already made.

Perhaps they will be found a little long. But sentiments and tastes differ; that which makes an impression on one heart, does not equally affect others. He, therefore, determined to give to each subject a sufficient extent in a connected and uninterrupted manner. Moreover, holy souls may content themselves with one point, even with one reflection with which to occupy themselves usefully during the time of prayer. If they judge proper, they may use for spiritual reading (besides the Conferences given for this purpose) all that they may not have used for their meditation or prayer.

Although this Retreat belongs particularly to the Religious of the Visitation, it is suitable, not only for all other religious persons, but also for all souls who, although in the world are not of the world, and who aspire to a greater perfection.

This work being divided into forty Meditations or Conferences may serve for reading during the forty days of Lent.

ORIGINAL APPROBATION.

I HAVE read, by order of the Chancellor, a Manuscript entitled: "Spiritual Retreat or familiar Conferences, according to the Spirit of St. Francis of Sales," and I have found nothing in this pious work, composed principally for the Sisters of the Visitation, contrary to faith and morals. On the contrary, all therein breathes the spirit of the holy Founder, with which these virtuous souls are animated.

The Sorbonne, the 18th of December, 1771.

ADHENT.

DIRECTORY OF THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

FOR THE

TEN DAYS OF RETREAT,

TAKEN FROM THE SOLITUDE OF ST. FRANCIS OF SALES.

To be Read on the First Day.

THE first day of Retreat should be employed in withdrawing the mind from created things, tranquillizing it, in becoming more solitary interiorly than exteriorly and in opening the heart to God alone.

Those who follow these exercises will, each evening before retiring, read over the meditation for the morrow, dwelling upon the point that touches them most. They may, if they wish, make use of it all day, or each time take a consideration and affection from the Meditations.

Those who wish to follow what is marked in the Custom-Book not only may, but ought to do so with simplicity, with the advice of the Superioress; but in this case I believe that these Meditations, and those of our Blessed Father on the same subject, may be useful for reading.

The day of confession, they will make only the ordinary meditations, and then occupy themselves in preparing for confession. It will also be well to make the usual reading on the subject of the meditation, making

the confession concisely, so as to take as short a time as possible; for it is not only for confession that these reviews are made, but to discover the state of our soul; and, what is more important, to make it known to those who direct us on the part of God. Especially should we find out the principal motives, passions, and impulses which have caused our failings, proposing to ourselves, the remedies we think most proper for our amendment. If we wish the Retreat to be profitable, it is then, principally, that we must practise holy simplicity in opening our hearts as our holy rules mark, and be faithful in following the advice given us.

We must also observe if we have advanced or not, since our last Retreat, and how we have kept our resolutions. The other days, after the morning meditation, we must occupy our minds with it while doing our work, or, if we experience difficulty in this, read from time to time some suitable subject so as to avoid distractions.

Afterwards, we will say our Office at the same time as the community, being attentive to it, as well as to the subject of prayer.

We will also hear holy Mass with attention. After the meditation that follows, we will make a little review, in form of examination upon what we have done during the morning, dwelling more upon the exercises than upon our faults. It will also be well to perform more mortifications than usual in the refectory, being also attentive to the reading which, if possible, we will refer to the subject of meditation. We should never divert our minds from this, lest the devil play us a trick and make us lose our time under the guise of holy thoughts.

If several spend the recreation together, it must be made profitable and devout, by conversing and cordially sharing good thoughts, views, and lights. We

cannot imagine how useful this exercise is when well performed.

It will be well to begin the time of silence by recalling some of the sweet, gentle, and loving thoughts of the morning meditation, rejoicing to return to more intimate communication with our divine Saviour, regretting whatever has turned our hearts from this holy exercise. If we have any difficulty in turning our minds to these holy thoughts, we may read some suitable pious book. We may also do this from time to time when dry or distracted, for it is most profitable to keep from our minds, during this holy time, any thought not conformable to our meditations. We especially advise that the reading on the first days should be made on the points of humility. This reading may be made with the community, although we may read at any time. Perhaps, we may find it more convenient to prepare during reading time the meditation to be made before Vespers, this being left free.

Vespers will be said with the community, and we will employ the conference time in reading some points of the rule and directory, especially in what concerns our employment, recalling the faults we have committed and their motives, the means and resolutions of amendment; considering what we must do to overcome each fault in particular and to practise the contrary virtue.

We will say Complin at the time marked, and read the point of prayer to be made afterwards; then take a little relaxation for a quarter of an hour, saying the beads. The exercises of the refectory and recreation will follow. Between the recreation and eight o'clock, or when we retire, or the next day, we may take notes on what we have remarked, for generally the review is made when we go to the choir at eight o'clock, and we must be very exact

in order to impress upon our minds all that has passed during the day. When we have free time we may make meditations or say our beads until the bell for the obedience, after which we read the meditation for the next morning, in order to reflect upon it and fix it in our minds during the quarter before Matins.

We may also in our cells or elsewhere perform some mortifications besides those that are customary in the refectory, as saying an Our Father with the arms extended, kissing the floor, prostrating, wearing the cincture, taking the discipline, and similar penances. Holy Communion should also be more frequent after the three days employed in preparation for confession.

It is to be observed that this directory is by no means obligatory, it is only to serve as a foundation and rule for those not yet accustomed to retreats, or those who are tried by aridity, obscurity, and wandering of mind, as well as for those who feel inclined to follow it. However, it would be well to express simply to the Superioress our desire on the subject, in order that holy liberty may not hinder holy obedience, nor holy obedience interfere with holy liberty.

On the day of preparation for confession we should first read the examination of conscience, given at the end of the exercises. It is advisable to think of it only on the day when the meditation on sin is made.

MEDITATION
FOR THE
EVE OF RETREAT.

First Point.

“I WILL lead her into solitude and there I will speak to her heart.” Osee ii., 14.

How consoling is this promise ! It is a God who makes it to me for the happiness of my soul. Behold, says He, days of salvation, in which I will take you aside, and shed upon you a ray of the light which surrounds Me, to enable you to see the wounds of your soul, and to discover the principal ones and their depth. Come, therefore, and follow Me into the desert ; there I will make known to you, your miseries, and I will give you the grace to apply the necessary remedies, how painful and repugnant soever, they may be to nature. Put yourself in a state to hear My voice, and to profit by My assistance, by separating yourself from every sensible object. Perhaps it is the last time that My mercy will invite you to meditate upon the terrible effects of My justice on those whom I have called to a greater perfection, and who have not corresponded to My designs. Rise then, from the dust, and break the chains which hold you captive. It is time to quit a state in which I can no longer recognize you. You cannot rise of yourself, but again I offer you the power of My Arm, which you have so often experienced, to draw you from the abyss into which you have fallen. Do not render this retreat useless for you. My designs, in your favor, will be accomplished, if you second my views.

Behold the epoch of your perfect conversion ; the time when I wish you to return to Me in a solid and unchangeable manner. Profit then by these movements

of grace. Remember your first entrance into religion ; what fervor in your prayers ! What generosity in your mortifications ! What fidelity in your spiritual exercises ! what dependance ! what abnegation ! what purity of intention ! How you have fallen from that first state ! How you have plunged into the most shameful servitude ! You who were destined to fill one of the highest places in heaven. Ah ! break the bonds of flesh and blood which attach you to perishable things, which you have so solemnly renounced. You were created to enjoy the holy liberty of My children, and not to grovel in the servitude of the animal spirit. Break down then, that fatal wall which separates you from Me. Change your manner of life. Shed over your infidelities torrents of tears ; no longer place obstacles to My graces ; render yourself worthy of Me, for I am still willing to love you, to live in you. The aurora begins to appear ; behold, the day approaches ; walk by its light, whilst My mercy offers it to you. New delays on your part may cause a dreadful darkness to succeed these rays of My light which now shine upon you. Not to profit by the treasure I offer you may be, perhaps, to destroy forever the efficacious resources which I now provide for your conversion. Appreciate their value, and profit by them, for the reformation of your conduct. Offer to Me upon the altar of penance, the double holocaust of your mind and your heart, to avenge My glory, for your past infidelities, and to be restored to the rights of My faithful children.

Second Point.

Behold me, O my God ! ready to do Thy divine Will I only deserve that thou shouldst abandon me, after so much abuse of Thy graces, so much resistance to Thy inspirations ; but Thou art a Father full of kindness, Who wilt not the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live. Thy voice resounds in the bottom of my heart, and I will be perfectly docile and faithful to it, in this retreat. Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth. My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready. I will no longer place obstacles to Thy mercy, whose treasures are opened

to me I throw myself into the arms of Thy paternal goodness, and I will pass over in the bitterness of my heart, all the years of my life. I will espouse the interests of Thy justice against myself, and represent to my mind, the great day of Thy vengeance, or rather that profound night which will be followed by no more day, when a rain of fire and sulphur, accompanied by thunder and lightning will consume the universe; when in the midst of the smoking remains of the destroyed world, nothing shall be heard but these dreadful words: "Arise ye dead, and come to judgment." I will prevent the rigors of that degree against me, by imposing on myself, the most severe penance for so many prevarications in my exercises of piety, in the observance of my rules; for so many confessions, which, when I consider the little regret I had for my faults and my little amendment, I have cause to fear were useless; for the many retreats, by which I have profited so little, and which not making me more perfect, have rendered me more culpable. I will now take the surest means, the most efficacious measures, to guard against the depravity of my heart. I will learn to conform my whole conduct to the sanctity of my profession. In a word, I will renew myself in the spirit of my holy vocation, in order to become, as St. Paul says, "a new creature in Jesus Christ," or as says St. Gregory Nazianzen, "another Jesus Christ."

Ah! Lord too many and too powerful motives lead me to acknowledge here, the favorable traits of Thy mercy on my soul, which merited only the blows of Thy vengeance. I will then, with the help of Thy grace, make all the effort I can, to occupy myself in this retreat, and forever, with Thee and my salvation, alone. I will consider myself as alone in this world with Thee; my whole self and all within me shall be in solitude; my mind, my senses, my heart, my soul, my body. Nothing human even in my thoughts, forgetfulness of all; silence and custody of the senses, entire and perfect recollection; such is the law I impose on myself, and which I will faithfully follow during these days of retreat. In calm all becomes sensible and my soul is desirous of experiencing,

of feeling even the lightest breath of Thy grace. Such are my dispositions, O my God! But what can I do without Thee? To Thee alone it belongs to dissipate my darkness by the splendor of Thy divine light. Deign to grant me this favor, my needs solicit it and Thy glory requires it. Teach me to know Thee and to know myself. Whilst enlightening me, pour into my heart Thy unction and love, which alone can work its salvation; take possession of it that, it may receive only the impressions of Thy grace; dispel its ignorance, strengthen its weakness, awaken its affections, grant that it may know itself, be reformed and reanimated. Kindle within it that fire, which Thou camest on earth to bring.

FIRST DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.—ON CREATION.

First Point.

“**THY** hands have made me. . . . Thou has granted me life and mercy, and Thy visitation hath preserved my spirit.”
Job x., 8. 12.

God, concentrated in Himself from all eternity, sufficient for Himself, finding in Himself His temple and abode, infinitely happy in the possession of Himself, executed in time, through the sole motive of His love, the design which He had formed from all eternity, of creating the world, of producing all creatures, and of drawing us from nothingness, to communicate to us a participation of His being. Oh gratuitous, eternal, and infinite love of God, Who, after being occupied with me, during all eternity, gave me existence in time; Who chose me from among the infinity of possible creatures, which He left in nothingness at the same time that He gave me being; a being so excellent, that His own image is impressed upon it. He is a pure spirit, eternal, intelligent, sovereign, free, independent, loving Himself necessarily, and loving all His creatures freely; He has given me a spiritual soul,

immortal, reasonable, capable of a will that bears the stamp of the divine sovereignty, and which, rendering it incapable of constraint, makes it mistress of its actions. But to impress in me humility, and to oblige me to practise so necessary a virtue; to humble me in the midst of my greatness, He has united in my person, a body of clay and a soul all spiritual. He has joined in me, time and eternity, immortality and death; He has rendered me capable, on the one hand, of contemplating the immutable and eternal truth with the angels, and on the other of enjoying the pleasures of the senses, with the beasts; near to God, by the spirituality of my soul, near to nothingness, by the corruption of my heart.

This God infinitely good and magnificent in His works, did not limit His gifts to this being of nature; He gave me a second being, which is the being of grace, infinitely more noble, and more excellent than the first, since it is a supernatural participation of His being, which has made me become His own image and likeness, in as much as He has communicated to my soul, faith, hope, charity, virtues, divine beauties, perfections, knowledge, affections and operations in some sort like His own. These precious gifts seemed to demand one not less essential, viz.—preservation. In vain would God have created me, if His hand, which gave me a being, did not preserve it to me; that is to say, if He did not create it continually, and did not draw it every moment, from the nothingness into which it would fall again. This continued creation renders me indebted to God for a new benefit, not less than the first, which gave me being. How many favors, and what should be my gratitude!

Second Point.

I adore, O my God! the infinite Power, which, with one word, drew the universe from nothingness. I adore Thy wisdom which has done all with weight and measure, and which is shown in all Thy works. But above all, I thank and adore Thee for having given me a being, the foundation of every other benefit to me, and that, in preference to so many others, that have remained in nothing-

ness. What can I say to show my gratitude? Return into my nothingness, humble myself under Thy almighty hand which has drawn me from it, acknowledge that there is an infinite distance between Thee, Who possessest the plenitude of being, and me, who have only a participation of that being. I must make Thee, O Lord, a continual sacrifice of a life, which I have received only to consecrate to Thy service. In fine, I must take for my portion the nothingness which is my origin. Dust and ashes, why should I glory in myself? What can I attribute to myself who am formed of the dust which is daily trampled under foot?

Nothingness being nothing has nothing and can do nothing. Ah! how many errors are dissipated by meditating upon this nothingness. "Search the depths of your nature," says St. Francis of Sales, "and see if you can find food for your vanity." Shall I be so foolish as to exalt myself for the gifts I possess, since I owe them to the pure liberality of my God? O Eternal Father, Who didst create that which was not, that no man might glory in himself, penetrate me incessantly with my nothingness; make my heart feel this conviction, not by abandoning me, as I have so often deserved on account of my pride, but by making me acknowledge Thee as author, centre, and principle of my existence. Thou couldst not give me a soul so noble, so excellent, but to serve and love Thee; it is then just that I use it conformably to the designs of Thy wisdom and goodness; that I employ its operations to know and adore Thee, to love and thank Thee, to preserve and perfect in myself the image of Thy being and perfection. The Apostle, St. Paul, teaches us that we carry the treasures of grace in earthen vessels; I shall fear then in possessing Thy grace, because a single motion of my heart is sufficient to make me lose it. I shall fear when I have lost it, because I do not know if I can recover it; I shall fear after having recovered it, because I shall become more guilty if I lose it again. I acknowledge, O my God, that nothingness is my origin not my principle, because it could not communicate to me a being which it had not; all comes to me from Thy liberal goodness, all in me is an effect of Thy power, a gift of Thy mercy;

Thy divine breath has given me life, and if it did not continually work in me, I would be without intelligence, without grace, without existence; I would cease to act if Thou didst cease to concur with me; Thou drawest me from nothingness as many times as Thou preventest me from relapsing into it. How these truths confound and humble me, for what use have I hitherto made of all Thy gifts? I have only made them serve my infidelities. The being which I received only to consecrate to Thee has served but to offend and outrage Thee. Yes, I have dishonored Him, by Whom and for Whom, I was made, Him, Who alone acts in me, Whose divinity surrounds me, by His presents, power, and essence. Nothingness clothed with benefits, I have used them against my Benefactor. I have lived as though I could dispose of my being and life. I have dared to irritate my God, Who could at any moment cast me into hell, or let me fall into that nothingness from which He drew me. Pardon me, my God. grace and mercy! I return to Thee, do not reject me; I am the work of Thy hands, a disfigured work it is true, but give me a new form, that I may, according to the design of creation, seek and attach myself but to Thee for time and eternity.

FIRST DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.—ON THE END OF MAN.

First Point.

“FEAR God and keep His commandments; for this is all man.”
Ecclesiastes xii., 13.

To fear and serve the Lord is the abridgment of the life of man, who should wish only to fulfil the end for which he was created. He has received from God life, motion, and being; and he owes Him the homage of it all. Independent as this supreme God is, He would have a worship. Being the principle of His own being, He will also be the centre of all our movements, and the term of all our desires. As He has done nothing but for Himself,

the end of man is necessarily the possession of His glory. It is for this glory He has created us, as He, Himself, says, and He could not give us any other end. He could draw us from nothingness, or leave us in it; He could advance or retard our creation; but supposing that He created us, He could create us only for Himself. Why is this? It is because He can only act for an end suitable to His goodness, and in giving us any other end than Himself, He would have created us to be unhappy, there being no true happiness but in Him alone.

God, all-powerful as He is, could not give us any other destination than Himself; but if He could have done it, if He had done it, should we not wish to be only for Him, since He alone is eternal and infinitely perfect; since all is in Him, and nothing out of Him, or without Him? All that is not God, reduces our heart to indigence and overwhelms it, as it were, with its own weight. "Oh Lord," exclaims St. Augustine, "Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart will always be agitated until it reposes in Thee." "Thou hast imprinted in our soul," says St. Francis of Sales, "a secret inclination which draws us to Thee, and which makes us feel unhappy when we are not with Thee. All that is less than Thee, may indeed occupy a soul which Thou hast made capable of possessing Thee, but it is impossible to fill it." What a glory, what a happiness for us, that God should make us feel, that He alone can make us happy; that all that is not God, is an evil; that it is hating ourselves not to love Him alone; that we can find no true pleasure but in the possession of His being, and in the enjoyment of His love; that all affection which is not for Him is lost; that every division of our heart is as fatal to us, as injurious to Him; that, finally, our interests are connected with His, and that His glory alone can produce our felicity. Man, loving this glory, seeks it ardently where it is not, because he seeks it out of God. He wishes to procure himself a name among men, mortal like himself, he wishes to be respected, feared, and obeyed; behold the illusion of his self-love; an illusion which is soon dissipated in a soul that is attentive to meditate upon its first beginning and its last end. Faith discovers to it so much nobleness in the one, so

much glory in the other, that it has a sovereign contempt for all that is not God. Pompous titles, earthly possessions, the pleasures of the senses incapable of filling the vast extent of its desires, excite its disgust. It despises those chimeras of greatness, those futile advantages, which are nothing but real meanness to a soul who comes from God, and who, destined to re-unite itself to Him in time and eternity, should content itself with Him alone.

My end, the soul says to itself, is God alone ; what can I desire out of Him ? What is more worthy of my whole heart ? Where can I find a more tender Father, a more faithful friend ? Ah ! if He had only permitted me to be occupied with Him at certain times, as being unworthy of so sublime an occupation, would I not have considered those limited moments as a precious benefit ? Why, then, having the happiness of being able to think incessantly of this divine object, and of being united to Him continually, as to the centre of my felicity, should I neglect this advantage ? No, I will never substitute a false happiness for the only true one ; I will consult better my own interests and without ever deliberating, I will incessantly refer to Thee, O Lord, all that I am ; I will breathe, think, act, and speak only for Thee ; in a word, I will occupy myself only with Thee, in time, that I may one day bless Thee in Thy glory for all eternity.

Second Point.

God is my end, consequently my end is that of God Himself ; could there be a more noble and excellent one ? This God, from all eternity, knows Himself, loves Himself, forms designs for His own glory, and executes them. Thus, He has created me to His image and likeness, for the same end ; He has given me a mind, capable of intelligence, that I may know Him, a free will and heart that I may love Him, a body and faculties that I may glorify Him. In virtue of my creation, I have an end as sublime as God Himself, since He is Himself His only end, and will forever be mine. Know thy dignity, my soul, not to take pride in it, but to render to thy first being, who is to be thy centre and thy term, the just tribute of thy homage.

Cease to undervalue, and to degrade in thee, the honor thou hast of having been made for God, and for God alone. In forgetting thyself, thou hast not known thyself, and thou hast become, not only like unto the beasts, but of a worse condition than they; since, although, deprived of reason, they act conformably to their end. Even the most insensible beings never deviate from their end. The riverlet flows incessantly towards the sea, which is its source; the stone tends perpetually towards the earth, which is its centre; the fire never ceases to ascend towards heaven, which is its sphere; the planets, the light, the seas, and the earth, all things obey His voice, and shall I alone, deviate from it? Divine Lord, eternal Wisdom, through Whom and for Whom I am formed, enable me to return to the ways of order and justice from which I have strayed. Reform in me the work of Thy hands which I have disfigured, and restore it to its pristine beauty. Let creatures and events, far from distracting me from Thee, who art my beginning and my end, enter into my esteem, excite my desires, and occupy my heart only inasmuch as they may bring me nearer and unite me to Thee. Undeceive me as to all that might share my desires, or enslave my inclinations. Thou alone, O God of my heart, fix all my desires; be the centre of all my intentions, the term of all my affections, O Lord, in the happy obligation under which I am of serving Thee, as a law from which I cannot dispense myself. Oh happy necessity! that constrains me, either to glorify Thee voluntarily in this world, by a holy and Christian life, or to glorify Thee eternally, in spite of myself, in hell: either to repair Thy glory by my conversion, or to repair it by my reprobation; either to exalt Thy mercy by my penance or to exalt Thy justice by eternal tears. I no longer deliberate. I will reform my conduct; I will seek no satisfaction but in Thee; I will give to my affections no other end. I will have no desire but to possess Thee, no fear but to lose Thee. I am in this world only to love Thee and to serve Thee: I will begin from this day to fulfil a duty so essential and so indispensable. I will return Thee love for love, attention for attention, and since, from eternity, Thou hast thought of me and

honorest Thy vile creature so far as to wish her for Thyself alone, so far as to be jealous of her desires and affections, of her whole heart, I will not cease to glorify Thee by my conduct; to refer every action to Thee, to concentrate myself in Thee, and to live and die only for Thee, Who on earth, as in heaven, can alone promote my good, my eternal felicity.

FIRST DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION.—ON THE END OF A CHRISTIAN.

First Point.

“THE Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve.” Matth. iv., 10.

Such is the law which God engraved upon my soul at the very moment He created me. In the first instant of my birth, He sealed me, as it were, with His seal, and consecrated me to His glory; but this indispensable obligation of serving Him alone has increased with my age, and has become as essential as my existence. This necessary obligation, which I contracted at my birth, became voluntary by the sacred engagements I formed by the mouth of my sponsors at baptism, and which I afterwards freely ratified. Since that happy moment, which consecrated me forever to the Supreme Being when I vowed to adore and serve Him, I belong to Him, and He has a right to say to me, as He said to Jacob and Israel;—“You are mine.” Consequently He ought to be the soul of all my thoughts, the motive of all my actions, the object of all my homages, the centre of all my desires, the term of all my steps, and the rule of all my conduct. “You are mine.”—Yes, Lord, and I should have Thee always present before my eyes, always imprinted in my mind, always engraved in my heart; I should prefer Thee to everything, and sacrifice everything for Thee, dearest Lord. Being the principle of my actions, it is just that

Thou shouldst be the end of them; Thou hast produced them by Thy love, they should be sacrificed to Thy glory; I should act only according to Thy will and never resist Thy hand, which always works good in my soul, which often turns away the evil it sometimes permits but never wills. Thou shouldst not only be the end of all my actions as the principle of my existence, as the Sovereign Being Who dost possess its plentitude, as the first beginning of all the movements of my heart, and of that liberty even with which Thou hast formed them; but as Head of the Church of which, through the choice of Thy predilection, Thou hast made me a member by holy Baptism. By all these titles all my actions, even the most indifferent, should be for Thee alone.

How holy and perfect would be the conduct of a soul penetrated and incessantly occupied with these truths, which form the elements of our religion! How elevated they are above the thoughts of the children of men, who living in the forgetfulness of God, are guilty at least of a criminal inaction! "They have turned aside from their end," says the prophet, and therefore have become useless. Then, all that I have done in my life for any other end than God, has been of no merit for me; even if I had performed miracles, God not having been the end of them, it would all be only vanity, and vanity of vanities. Overwhelming reflection.

Second Point.

I am confounded, when I compare my conduct with my duties. Made for God alone, I have given myself up to exterior things and sensible objects. How much time, therefore, have I lost! What a frightful void in my life! How many graces I have wasted! How often have I abused the merits of Jesus Christ! How few merits I have acquired before God, and how many talents I have buried! In a word, how little I have lived, since I have lived so little for my last end, since I have reflected so seldom upon the reason of my existence, have corresponded so badly to the designs of God's mercy upon my soul! Ah! I have most frequently acted without reflection

and without principle; therefore, instead of the care, fidelity, and zeal, ardor, and generous sentiments which I should have shown in the service of God, I have evinced, only baseness, negligence, tepidity, infidelity, languor, and insensibility, inutility and iniquity. Behold the history of my life. I blush at my conduct, O my God, and desire to reform it. Henceforth, I will use exterior objects, only as means to go to Thee, instead of reposing in them as my centre. I will no longer seek the creature but in Thee, or rather, I will ask myself in all my actions or projects, what relation they have to Thee and to eternity. In all things I will only act according to Thee, O Lord; I will no longer see, hear, or do anything, either agreeable or disagreeable, but with a view of uniting myself to Thee. Thy spirit shall actuate and animate me. Jealous to please only Thee, I will rise above human respect. I will apply myself to do well all that I do,* because I know that whatever is done for Thee, should be done perfectly; that is, with exactitude, fervor and perseverance, through an interior spirit and principle of religion. Such are my resolutions, O my God! My tongue shall have no expressions, my heart no sentiment, my mind no faculties, my body no movement, my soul no operation, my life no duration, but to consecrate all to Thee. I will have no care but that of knowing Thy divine will, no occupation but to accomplish it; no zeal but for the interests of Thy glory, no ardor but to surmount all the difficulties, to brave all the obstacles, to make all the sacrifices, which Thy service and my holy state require. But, O my God, the sad experience of the past, makes me fear for the future, unless Thou reform the levity of my mind and the instability of my heart. Preserve my soul from the misfortune of again forgetting my last end. May I repair my past losses by paying Thee the most perfect homage, and by attaching myself to Thee inviolably and forever.

FIRST DAY.

CONFERENCE.—ON THE END OF THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

“THE Lord hath chosen thee this day, to be His peculiar people.” Deutr. xxvi., 18.

St. Francis de Sales, has perfectly interpreted to his dear daughters these words of the Lord to the Israelites : “Your only end,” says he, “is to be united to God as Jesus Christ is united to His Father.” By this union I do not mean that which unites all christians to God by Baptism ; a union by which all may justly tend to heaven and attain their end by the general and spacious way of the commandments. But for you, my dear daughters, this is not so ; for besides this common obligation which you have with all christians, God, through a special love, has chosen you to be His dear spouses. Now, do you wish to know what it is to be the spouse of your God, that is to say, a religious ? It is to be united to Him by the continual mortification of yourselves ; it is to live only for Him ; your heart, your tongue, your eyes, your hands, and all the rest, continually serving His divine Majesty.”

According to these precious maxims, what should be the end of a daughter of St. Francis of Sales ? A union with God so perfect that He alone would be the universal object and constant end of all her movements. A worthy Religious of the Visitation should then refer to God all the thoughts of her mind, all the desires of her heart, all the exterior and interior movements of her powers, in a word, all her actions, and should refer them to Him with all possible ardor, zeal, and perseverance. She should regard our Lord as the object, the term, and the end of all her inclinations, and attach herself to Him by a perfect devotedness, so that nothing could be able to separate her from Him. This is saying too little. To use the expressions of her holy founder, she should be united to God, as Jesus Christ is united to His father. Thus, the union which her mind should have with God, does not merely consist in thinking of Him, in being occupied with

Him, but also in having, as Jesus Christ had with His father, but one same thought with Him, that is, in thinking of all things as He thought of them, in esteeming only what He esteemed, in despising only what He despised, and in entering perfectly into all His sentiments.

In like manner the union of a religious soul with her God, does not consist merely in consecrating her affections to Him, in desiring His glory, His kingdom, His possessions, but also in having with Him, as Jesus Christ had with His father, but one same will; in willing in all things what He wills, and in never willing what He does not will; in being so strongly attached to His will that nothing is capable of leading her to withdraw from it, to follow her own or that of creatures.

Finally, the union of all her other powers with God does not consist only in simply acting for Him, but also, like Jesus Christ with His Father, in having but one same action with Him; that is in applying herself only to the things which He has imposed on her, to the duties which He has prescribed for her, to labor at them, and to fulfil them in concert with Him; to apply herself with such zeal, fidelity and constancy, that nothing will be capable of making her abandon them, or cool her ardor. In a word all the spiritual life, all perfection, the end of her state consists in the most intimate union of her mind, her heart, all her powers with God, having with Him but one same thought, one same will, one same operation, and in some manner but one same being, by an entire and perfect transformation into Him, which causes her to pass, so to say, into the divine unity, which confounds, hides, loses her in God with Jesus Christ. Such is the contract she has made with the Lord; such is the end of her state in the mind of God, Who has called her to it, and of the Church, that has opened to her the way; such are the views she herself should have had in entering holy religion. According to these incontestable principles "a true daughter of the Visitation," says St. Francis of Sales, "is a soul who has no spirit but that of Jesus Christ; who lives in the most intimate union with God, in the most perfect abnegation of herself, in the most pro-

found lowliness and abjection, in her own eyes ; in the most tender charity and peace with her neighbor." St. Chantal says : " she is a soul who is detached from her self to be united in everything to her God ; who crucifies her will, her judgment, her inclinations, to conform to God ; who corrects her imperfections, to approach nearer and nearer to Him ; who makes Him her sovereign desire, her only love, as He is her happiness and her life ; a soul whose affections and will God possesses exclusively." Thus, a truly worthy daughter of the Institute is a soul dead to the world and to herself, united to Jesus Christ crucified, consecrated by her state, and devoted by affection to His love and service. Disengaged from the cares and passions of the world, she has no mind or heart but for God ; attached by indissoluble bonds to Him Whom she has chosen for her spouse, she has no other ambition than to please and follow Him. In the desire of resembling Him she makes poverty her riches ; obedience her will ; mortification her pleasure ; abjection her glory ; the Cross her joy and her triumph. Behold the general end of her life ; but what are its details ?

Sometimes in the sweet silence of solitude, entirely removed from the world, she acknowledges and blesses the divine mercy, which has separated her from that mass of corruption, and drawn her from that cursed land which is entirely under the power of the spirit of darkness. She laments the sad condition of blind worldlings, and through a charitable zeal, offers for them her prayers and her life.

Sometimes, nourishing her soul with pious meditation, she reflects upon the promises she has made to God, and reanimates herself in His service. She laments her weaknesses, seeks and finds a remedy for her ills. She rises even to the abode of the saints, contemplates there what her illustrious founders, the heroines of her Institute have done for God, and at the sight of the glory which crowns them, she is animated to walk in their footsteps. She remembers the eternal years, and detaches herself more and more, from all that is perishable. She hears and answers the voice of God, who daily asks of her some new sacrifice as a proof of her love, and takes it

upon Himself to be the reward of her combats in His service. There, in the delights of contemplation or in the aridities of meditation, where she receives the holy favors and enjoys the tender and intimate communications of God, or is purified by dryness of heart and anxieties of mind, she seeks only to know better the designs of God over her, and to correspond to His preventing grace. She applies herself to consult only the movements of the Heart of her Spouse that, thereby, she may regulate her own. She has no attachment but for her duties; no desire nor ardor, but for the sacred Banquet to which divine Love invites her. These are her sentiments; this is her conduct.

Subject to the rule, she edifies others by her example and animates them by her fervor. She is always composed in her exterior, modest in her looks, and even in the tone of her voice; simple in her manners; even in her humor; moderate in her action; wise and religious in all her proceedings; humble without affectation; grave without ostentation; serious without constraint; gay without levity; condescending without weakness; charitable without distinction; devout without singularity; fervent without eagerness; affable and obliging. She is punctual to the community hours, exact in the observance of the Rule; promptly and respectfully submissive to the orders of her superiors. In a word, faithful to all her duties, there is nothing humiliating in the service of God to which she does not aspire, nothing abject to which she does not abase herself, nothing elevated to which she does not tend. She has passions only to overcome them; pleasures only to sacrifice them; obligations only to fulfil them; she fears to show herself almost as much as to sin, and she fears to sin much more than to die. Her heart is the sanctuary of virtue, her mouth the interpreter of truth, and her whole conduct the faithful impression of the life of Jesus Christ.

What reflections should a Religious of the Visitation make upon this portrait! In it she must, indeed, recognize the spirit of her holy founder. There is no other way for her to attain her last end; therefore she must follow it. "You then see clearly," says St. Francis de Sales, "the

end you should have in view, in order to be a worthy spouse of our Lord. Live then all your life, perform all your actions, form yourself from day to day according to this end, and God will bless you."

I know, she should say to herself, what God wills of me, and what I owe Him; I know what my salvation and my state require. I will labor seriously at the reformation of my conduct, that I may not be condemned at the hour of my death, by the sanctity of my state and the benefits of my God. What is there in me Lord, which could lead Thee to consider me as something, and how have I attracted Thy goodness! Why then should I not follow the spirit of my vocation? Why should I not correspond to it by conduct worthy of Thy grace? Thy will having placed me in the religious state, Thy mercy will not refuse me wherewith to assure my solid happiness. Thy justice and goodness are engaged to support me, if I walk in the path Thy wisdom has traced for me. Strengthen my will, O Lord, animate my confidence, and assist my labors. I will no longer occupy myself with anything but my last end. I will redouble my steps in order to repair lost time, and to return into the way from which I have deviated. I will apply myself more than ever to profit by the treasures which Thou hast confided to me with so much liberality; by the favors which Thou hast lavished on me without interruption; by the beneficent dispositions of Thy heart towards me; by the desire which Thou hast for my real happiness; and by the many graces which I have cast from me by my infidelities. My gratitude and my constancy shall be Thy joy; all my days shall be occupied by the remembrance of Thy benefits, and sanctified by the use which I will make of them. Bless, O Lord, my present determination, and let it find in the salutary gifts of Thy grace, all that can shelter it from my former vicissitudes, that as Thou hast chosen me to be Thy particular child, Thou mayst be more particularly my God.

SECOND DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.—ON MORTAL SIN.

First Point.

“THE mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed; because His commiserations have not failed.”—Jer. Lament., iii., 22.

With what eye can a religious look upon mortal sin, which kills the soul, closes heaven and opens hell to her?

O Spouse of Jesus Christ, shudder at the sight of this sovereign evil, whose abomination occasioned the death of your divine Spouse, caused His blood to flow and renews the bitterness of His passion; whose perpetration is the most formal contempt of His authority, the most outrageous abolition of His merits, the most criminal profanation of His benefits, the most unworthy preference of the creature, of satan himself, to the divine Majesty. It is a sin enormous in its extent, and, like the demon whose name Jesus asked, and who was called legion, it is a monster composed of a thousand others. It is at the same time a revolt against God, against a friend, against a king; disobedience to a father, ingratitude to a Saviour; an adultery which dishonors a spouse, a crime against a benefactor, a sacrilege which sullies the temple of the Holy Ghost. It is a deicide like that of the Jews; it not only attacks the body of Jesus, but His power of which it wishes to deprive Him; it would also rob Him of His wisdom; it abuses His goodness, irritates His justice, wearies His patience, insults His liberality, annihilates His Cross and His love. Enormous sin, if we look on it with the eyes of God! It outrages all His perfections; it would even destroy His being, were it possible; it wishes that God had no power to punish it, no justice to will its punishment, no wisdom to know it; it wishes that there should be no God, since it would despoil Him of His perfections, without which He could not be God. It is a sin, which annihilates all mysteries, offends the three persons of the Holy Trinity, the authority of the Father, the wisdom of the Son, and the

love of the Holy Ghost ; which annuls the Incarnation of the Word, rendering absolutely useless in its essence and principle the love with which Jesus Christ so loved the world that He gave Himself for it. It breaks, or, at least, renders imperfect the personal union of God with man, by separating man from God. In fine, it is a sin which, according to the Apostle, crucifies Jesus Christ anew, because it renews the cause of His death. It is a more frightful cross to our divine Saviour than the first, which was a cross of pain, whilst this is, if I may say so, a cross of sin. The first was the effect of the ignorance of the Jews, for, had they known Him, they would not have crucified Him ; whereas the latter is the effect of the barbarity of christians who know Him to be their God and, at the same time, crucify Him. The first cross was to effect the salvation of men, whereas this prevents that salvation and renders useless the life, sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. Our Saviour seems to feel this so much that He complains of it by the mouth of the prophet, saying : “ What will then become of My blood and what utility will they derive from My sacrifice ? ” This sin deprives the soul of God, Who is her sovereign good, and obliges this tender Father to abandon the work of His predilection, as having become the object of His hatred and malediction. It strips the soul of all grace, destroys all merit, annihilates all virtue, renders useless all good works. The sinner no longer deserves that the earth should bear him, the air serve him to breathe, or nature supply his wants, because he has abused all these things to offend their common Creator, Who had granted him the use of them. He deserves to lose his mind, his body and his whole being, because he has employed against his God an existence that was given him only for God’s glory, and if he still preserves it, it is only to make him suffer the punishment to which God’s justice condemns him.

Consider the dreadful chastisement, which the divine vengeance has exercised and will exercise upon sin until the end of ages. It was the avenging wrath of God, thundering against sin, that hurled from the highest heavens into the bottom of the abyss, the angels, guilty of a single thought of pride, without giving them time to

repent ; which drove the first man from paradise, stripped him of all the privileges of original justice and condemned him, with all his posterity, to death. It was the terrible justice of an offended God that drowned the whole world under the waters of the deluge, that rained fire upon criminal cities, that armed the exterminating angel against the first-born of the children of Egypt ; that filled the desert with serpents, that swallowed up the children of Aaron in the bosom of the earth and, in fine, has caused us to be born children of wrath, subject to all the calamities of this life, excluded from the kingdom of heaven and eternal happiness. It has enkindled those avenging flames, which are prepared for an eternity of torments, an eternity of pain, which alone, alas ! can avenge God, and is, perhaps, too light for the malice of a single mortal sin.

But if such are the terrible consequences of the sins of men in general, what must be those of the sins of a religious ? “The heathen sins as a man,” says St. Bernard, “but the soul consecrated to God sins as an angel, because she sins with more malice, having received more light.” The heathen is an enemy already judged, says Jesus Christ, because he does not believe ; but the soul loaded with special graces is a friend who, by sinning, brings abomination into the holy place, as the angel did in heaven. Therefore, God formerly required that as many sacrifices of expiation should be offered Him for the sin of one soul consecrated to His altar, as would have been offered for a whole nation. For this reason, Jesus said to Pilate, speaking of Judas : “He who delivered Me up to you has committed a greater sin than you, because he was My disciple.” Thus He has a right to say to a religious guilty of mortal sin : “They who offend Me in the world, outrage Me, it is true, but they offend with less ingratitude and malice than you, who dare to insult Me in the very house where I lavish upon you all My treasures, in the sacred abode, where I surround you with all that can inspire you with My fear and love, in My sanctuary, where I leave with you the treasure of My adorable blood ; therefore, you are no longer but an object of horror to Me, so much the more

hateful, as I see you in the midst of My people. I will avenge Myself upon you as a God ; your heart shall become more and more hardened, compunction shall not reside there, piety shall not soften it, threats shall not intimidate it, it shall become deaf to My voice. I will give it up to its irregular desires, to the error of its thoughts. Forgetting the dignity of your engagements, you will make rapid progress in the path into which you have strayed. I will avenge by your blindness, the profanation you make of My most special graces in a region of innocence and sanctity, and from the land of the saints where you dwell, I will at length precipitate you with the demons into the lowest depths of hell, for all eternity.

Second Point.

Alas ! O my God, what resources remains to me in the frightful danger to which I see myself exposed ? The multitude and grievousness of my offenses overwhelm me with their weight. Enter not into judgment, O Lord, with Thy servant, for nothing can justify me in Thy sight. Oh ! that I had the hearts of the greatest penitents, the hearts of all men, to be penetrated with a sorrow such as my sins deserve ! Oh, that I could weep day and night over the sins I have committed since my baptism, alas ! since my entrance into religion. Oh, that I could wash them away by the shedding of my blood ! How great is Thy mercy, O God, which has hitherto prevented my falling into that gulf, where eternal and unavailing tears are shed ! The rebellious angels are expiating in those burning furnaces a thought of pride, punished as soon as committed, or rather, conceived ; have I not merited the same torments even more than they ? Do they not seem to have a right to reproach Thee with Thy patience in my regard, by exposing to Thee the details of my life and saying : “ Eternal Providence, what have we done in comparison with this religious, guilty of so many iniquities ? Thou hast left her on earth, giving her time, a Mediator, graces, the assistance of a retreat ; Thou watchest over her as a father and she will again, perhaps, abuse so many benefits ? Ah ! if we had had some one of

these favors which Thou lavishest on her ! But no ! Thou hast treated us in all the rigor of Thy justice ! Where, then, is justice ? Strike, if Thou art just, strike with the same sword a soul more criminal than we."

I acknowledge, Lord, that I cannot but approve the reasons which these reprobate blasphemers have to demand my damnation, or to complain of theirs, if, at the same time, Father of mercies and God of vengeance, Thou hadst not been as merciful to me, as Thou hast been just to them. May the sight of Thy mercy towards me inspire me with gratitude and love ! May the sight of Thy prompt justice towards them inspire me with fear ! Ah ! can I ever again offend a God, so severe and so good ? No, Lord, I will embrace penance, that compound of Thy mercy and justice ; a contrite and humble heart will much more exalt Thy glory and justify Thy judgments than all the blows which Thy vengeance could deal upon me. I will unceasingly recall my offenses to punish them. Thou art just and Thy judgments are just ; I fear them. If Thou reprehend me in Thy wrath, what glory will redound to Thee by my damnation ? When Thou shalt have stricken the dust, will the dust contribute to Thy glory ? Thy justice, by avenging Thy blood which I have profaned will be satisfied, but would it not be still more so by my pardon, by which will be applied to me the merits of the precious blood Thou hast shed for me ? Thou wilt be glorified by my tears and penance. Thou, Thyself, tell me that if I do penance for the crimes I have committed, Thou wilt repent of the vengeance Thou hadst resolved to inflict upon me. These words may appear unworthy of Thy majesty to those who know not Thy goodness, but as for me, far from abusing Thy kind indulgence, I will thereby animate myself to contrition. This thought will render sweet and light, the very rigor of penance, whose shadow alone has, heretofore, alarmed me. The remembrance of Thy mercy will enkindle in me a lively ardor to offer Thee daily some new satisfaction.

I will immolate upon the altar of penance the double holocaust of my mind and heart, to avenge Thy glory for my past outrages and to be restored to the rights of Thy faithful children. I will embrace with resignation all that

can humble me, to expiate the faults I have committed by my pride. I will excuse and bear with my neighbor to repair my detractions and calumnies, my dissatisfactions and murmurings. I will not be troubled at grievous events, but profit by them to pay my debts. I will repair my dissipation by recollection and silence; my self-love by mortification; my tepidity by regularity. I will never complain of what may be disagreeable to my taste, painful to my heart, contrary to my mind, crucifying to my body, because I have deserved to be drenched with the gall of the asp and the wine of the wrath of God in the very depths of hell. I will deprive myself of all sensible satisfaction, there being no longer any lawful or innocent pleasures for a soul so guilty as mine, This cry, "I have sinned!" which shall come incessantly from my heart, will make me endure everything with peace and gratitude, regulate and mortify my senses, combat my passions, subdue my inclinations, renounce my judgment and my will, neglecting nothing to redeem myself by the sufferings of this life from the torments of eternity.

Such are my resolutions, O my God, and, if I am unfaithful, punish me Thyself by humiliation, disgrace, sickness, dryness, disgust, privation, interior and exterior pains. If I ever willingly relapse into mortal sin, over which I wish to weep all my life, may the earth swallow me up, the sun refuse me its light, and fire its warmth; may all creatures rise up against me. Oh my God, sustain me in the sentiments which Thy grace has produced, rather let me die a thousand times than ever offend Thee by a single mortal sin.

SECOND DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.—ON VENIAL SIN.

First Point.

“THEY that love the Lord, will keep His way.”—Eccles. 18.

It is not enough, particularly for a religious who makes a special profession of loving God, to have a horror of the sin that offends Him mortally. She must also avoid with extreme care every thing that can displease Him. She should not even make a distinction between sin and sin, between offense and offense, for can a generous and feeling heart consider as a trifle what wounds its blood? Can a religious soul look with indifference upon a sin that afflicts the heart, and excites the jealousy of her divine Spouse?

Jealousy in the creature is unjust, because it appropriates to itself what was not made for it; but in Jesus Christ, it is justice, because every thing and especially the religious soul belongs to Him. It is also mercy, for why is He so jealous, especially of the purity of this soul? Will He be happier on account of it? No,—but she cannot be happy without this purity, and He wishes to associate her to His own happiness. But as nothing defiled can enter the kingdom of heaven, His glory seems diminished in His own eyes, as He sees her hastening to destruction.

What a subject of bitterness for the love of Jesus Christ is a religious, who would not commit great sins, but who makes no scruple of committing slight ones, or what she calls slight; who satisfies her inclinations, provided they are not manifestly sinful; who passes her times of meditation in a voluntary languor of mind who approaches the Sacraments without fervor and without fruit; who no longer seeks to please God and advance in virtue; who, always dissipated and distracted, no longer listens to the inspirations of grace, what does He

think of one who obeys her rule through constraint, or human respect; who entertains not too tender, but too natural friendships; who occupies herself, not with readings that corrupt the heart, but that amuse the mind; who does not wish to violate her vow of obedience, but delays to ask; interprets, supposes, or abuses the consent of superiors; who counts for a little thing a marked resentment, a deliberate untruth, an act of sloth, a voluntary negligence, a thought of vanity wilfully entertained, a sensuality, an impatience manifested, a jealousy declared, a malicious joke, a slight detraction. What does He think of one who, says to herself and to others: "It is only a venial sin, it is only weakness!" O deceitful and fatal language!

Venial sin cannot be a slight evil since it is an offence against God. It is a want of respect for His majesty, and an indifference for His goodness, a contempt for His sanctity, a want of submission to His law. Jesus Christ has so great, so essential an opposition to this sin that He can cease to be God sooner than cease to hate it. It deprives the soul of a new grace she would have received, of a degree of glory she might have acquired, of a degree of love that the heart of God would have conceived for her. Even the lightness of the matter renders it in some manner less excusable. Does not the sincerity and delicacy of friendship appear in small services? Do we rely much on the sentiments of those who limit them to not deeply insulting their friends? They are but weaknesses, she says. Can she consider as simple weaknesses faults which attack the eternal greatness, the infinite majesty of God, faults, which, without the mercy of God, would merit an infinite and eternal punishment?

The evil is not mortal, she says. Is there, then, no evil in the world but death? It is not mortal considered in itself, but does it not become so in its increase? St. Francis of Sales says, there is no venial sin which may not become mortal when neglected, because from this state of negligence one passes to contempt. Temptation comes, grace is weakened, and, from a little fault, one falls as it were necessarily into a greater, sometimes by way of inclination, often by way of disposition, and again, by way

of punishment. By way of inclination : one is accustomed, by degrees, to see danger without fear, and light faults with indifference then in a critical moment, the devil making a last effort, the heart, already moved and softened, hesitates, and yields. The arrow is shot, the abyss is open, and the soul falls into it. What rapidity in the progress of evil ! First languor, then weakness followed by indifference, and finally, the depth of misfortune, the loss of the soul.

By way of disposition : venial sin insensibly and gradually cools fervor, obscures the interior light, causes the joy and unction of the Holy Ghost to disappear, destroys a relish and inclination for heavenly things, weakens faith, eclipses charity, dissipates attention and vigilance. The eternal truths no longer make any impression. The soul, having thus become weak and blind, is in a disposition to yield on dangerous occasions, and is almost always overcome on the first.

By way of punishment : what is the tacit language of a soul that does not wish to avoid venial sin ? She says : "Such a thing displeases God, but I do not care," or, "I know not if it will displease God, but I will not examine it". . . . ; her indifference necessarily causes that of our Lord. No more special Providence over her, no more particular protection, no more care to withdraw her from great temptations, dangerous occasions ; no more strong graces in pressing needs ! This subtraction of grace is the cause of a more grievous fall ; it leads to a fatal step, and thence, often, to reprobation. Hence, if the greatest sinner becomes a saint, when careful not to sin deliberately, the greatest saint becomes a sinner, when she allows herself habitually to commit faults with deliberate malice.

We hear of the dreadful judgments of God, of those thundering blows that overturn the cedars of Libanus and make the stars fall from heaven. We are alarmed, but often these judgments are not so deep as we think. The religious soul that was thought so wise, so regular, who had fulfilled all her employments with approbation, makes a scandalous fall. Go back to the source. For a long time, her relaxations in the service of God, her numerous venial sins prepared the great Judge to deprive her of His

special protection in the evil day. A soul truly generous and faithful to her God, would not have experienced such a disaster. Rarely does a religious attentive to avoid venial sin fall into mortal faults, but a religious, who is negligent about light offenses, always falls into more grievous sins.

Second Point.

Alas! Lord, how little have I understood these truths which faith teaches me! What is my life weighed in the scales of the sanctuary? A tissue of faults; levity of the tongue, vanity of the mind, want of charity, rash judgments, loss of time, sensuality, jealousy, resentment, and curiosity. I do not yield to anger, but am I not often bitter, morose, and impatient? Am I not attached to the things that I use? I follow my rule, but is it not with tepidity, and without the interior spirit? I confess often, but is it not without amendment? My communions are frequent, but are they the more fervent? I perform my exercises, I assist at the meditations, but is it not without preparation, without love, without intention, or through habit? Do I not limit my obedience to capital points and dispute incessantly between counsel and precept? What an illusion I have made to myself, perhaps, in certain matters, where the limits of good and evil touch so closely, and where it is so difficult to discern the point which separates venial from mortal sin! How often have I considered as light those inconsiderate looks, those rising desires, those dangerous thoughts, in which the heart, floating, as it were, between the sentiment and the consent, cannot discern what is or is not, what it fears or what it loves, what it seeks or what it rejects! How often have I considered as light, cutting railleries, pointed detractions, which have left bleeding wounds in the heart of my neighbor? Alas! how far might I not carry this detail. But what makes me tremble is that I have considered these faults so small.

How can I call little a sin that resists the will of God, despises His law, obscures His light in my soul? A sin that deprives God of more glory than all my holiest actions, services, and homages. . . what do I say! . . .

of more than all saints, all creatures, have been able to give Him by their adorations and sacrifices.

How can I call light a sin which, as it offends God, is the evil of God, and so great an evil that the desolation of the whole earth and the ruin of the world, the destruction of all men and angels cannot be compared to it?

How can I call light a sin that becomes so much more considerable for me, as it directly combats grace and the end of my vocation? which places the greatest obstacle to my perfection, and for which the voluntary affection and habit in me is a mortal sin? Are not trifles on the lips of seculars blasphemies in a religious? Does it suffice for me to renounce all that can separate me from God? Ought I not by my state to draw aside the lightest cloud that could hide from me His presence?

How can I call light a sin which, it is true, does not withdraw sanctifying grace, but tarnishes its splendor? which weakens, and diminishes the actual grace that enables me to avoid dangerous occasions? a sin which prevents, or renders useless, the assistance which God destines for my perseverance? a sin which does not efface in me, it is true, the image of God, but obscures it? which causes not the death of my soul, but which gives it a wound that, if neglected, may become mortal? which, if it does not separate me from God, cools His love for me; if it does not exclude me from heaven, places me at a distance from it? which if it does not cause my damnation, leads to it?

How can I call light a sin which God has punished in so terrible a manner in His most faithful servants? In Moses, whom for a slight mistrust He excluded from the promised land; in David, whom for a slight vanity He afflicted with terrible scourges; in Ezechias, that holy king of Israel, whom for an indiscreet complacency, He punished even to the third generation; in Saul, whom, for reserving, contrary to His orders, some of the spoils of the Amalekites, and offering sacrifice on the seventh day without waiting for the prophet, He rejected; in Osa, and in the twenty-five thousand Bethsamites, the first for daring to support the Ark of the Covenant, the second for looking, although with respect, upon it.

In fine, how can I call light a sin, for which so many souls whom God loves and who love Him are now burning in the flames of purgatory? And do I not experience myself the punishment which God exercises upon religious souls, who are base enough to commit voluntary venial sins? Do I not feel that subtraction of graces, which are almost necessary for my salvation? Do I not feel the terrible consequences of the indifference, which causes God to abandon me to the course of a general Providence? Has He any longer over me that special Providence, which produces within me those particular graces that secure salvation. Why, in a state so sanctifying as mine, am I so little advanced in virtue?

I acknowledge, my God, that I have stopped the course of Thy grace by my facility in committing what I considered only slight sins, and perhaps overturned the designs of Thy mercy for my perfection, but I acknowledge it with the most lively sentiments of sorrow. May I, during the remainder of my life, multiply my acts of contrition beyond the number of my sins. I firmly resolve never again deliberately to offend Thee. May this resolution be for me the beginning of a new life, a life exempt from sin, replete with virtues, and above all, with Thy love. How can a soul that makes profession of loving Thee deliberately say: "Yes, I know this action displeases God, yet I will do it." Does such conduct accord with Thy love? I will love Thee, my God, and then, I will sin no more, at least voluntarily; for true love and the will to sin cannot dwell in the same heart. "Whoever loves God," says St. Chrysostom, "would prefer the flames of hell to the slightest offence against Him," and St. Augustine says he would rather be in hell without sin, than in heaven, with the least stain upon his soul. These great sentiments will become mine; but, Lord, there is no efficacious resolution, no secure sanctity, if Thou withdraw Thy hand; there is no strength that can support me, if Thou, Thyself, do not sustain me. Charitable physician of my soul, let Thy power uphold my weakness. May Thy zeal for my perfection enkindle mine. May Thy divine love strengthen me in the way of Thy commandments; may

it render me prompt to accomplish all that is pleasing to Thee, and inflexible in never consenting to anything that can offend Thee.

SECOND DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION.—ON THE ABUSE OF GRACE.

First Point.

“AND unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required.”—Luke xii., 48.

A religious has not only her sins to lament before God. The graces she receives from Him are as much to be feared for her as her iniquities ; or rather, her sins are so dreadful only on account of the graces which are lavished upon her. These graces are the voice of God which speaks to her heart, the divine breath which animates her soul, the ray of wisdom which enlivens her mind, the flame of love which excites her will, the sacred seed which ought to produce her sanctification, and be the principle of her salvation, and the fruitfulness of favors, the price of the blood of Jesus Christ. By resisting grace, she stifles the voice of her God, she outrages His spirit, she becomes rebellious to His light, repulses the efforts of His love, renders sterile a divine seed, ruins the foundation of her salvation, tramples under foot the blood of Jesus Christ.

By this want of correspondence to grace, she withdraws from the dominion that God has over her, a dominion absolute, universal, and eternal. God is not absolute in a heart that does not wish to submit to Him ; His empire is not universal in a soul that refuses what He demands. His reign is not eternal in a soul that, belonging sometimes to Him, sometimes to herself, rejects His authority which is not less indivisible than the truth of His being. Thus, she opposes herself to the tender love of this beneficent God, Who inclines to do her good. By this want of correspondence, the unfaithful soul at length forces

God to leave her, to oppose His justice to His mercy, by making her the object of His anger, having wished to make her the cherished object of His love.

The dreadful chastisements are, first, the subtraction of the graces she has abused. This our Lord seems to declare under the figure of a vine: "I have planted," says He, "a vine upon the declivity of a fertile mountain," that is to say, I have placed this soul in religion upon a mountain, elevated above the things of earth, where the abundance of My graces and the unction of My mercy flow with profusion. What have I not done to cultivate this vine and put it into a good state for bearing fruit? I have closed the avenues to those who passed by; I have surrounded it with a ditch, with a living hedge; I have taken away all the stones; I have built a tower in the midst of it, to observe from all sides whatever could harm it; I have constructed a press to make wine, that is, I have removed this soul from the world and from the occasions of sin; I have delivered her from temporal cares, I have surrounded her with interior and exterior helps; I have given her rules, constitutions, observances to fulfil; I have provided against all the obstacles that might prevent her increase in virtue. I have lavished on her talents, qualities, graces, inspirations, lights, sacraments, examples, and retreats. I have placed over her vigilant superiors; I have imposed on her mortifications, austerities, and all the means that could urge her to do well, and to express in an edifying life the precious liquid of virtues that embalms heaven and earth. What more could I do than I have done? "I hoped" continues our Lord, "that this vine would yield Me grapes, but I found none, or only bad ones. What, therefore, shall I do? I will abandon it, I will pluck it up, I will destroy the hedge, and it shall be pillaged; I will throw down the wall, and they that pass by shall trample it under foot; it shall be pruned and pressed no more; thorns and briars shall grow there, and I will command the clouds of heaven to water it no more." That is to say, I hoped that this religious would correspond to my care, my love and my graces, but what do I receive from her? what does she produce? Scarcely a few good works performed with

negligence, through base and human views. I find in her no solid virtue, no constancy in good, no relish for divine things. I find only imperfection in the observance of her vows, a false conscience under pretext of not being scrupulous, maxims of relaxation allied to confessions and communions, only a dead or dying faith. It is enough. Her little correspondence to my graces renders her unworthy of them. I will withdraw them, and will give her up to a reprobate sense. I will deprive her of my inspirations. I will use towards her the same measure she has used towards me; I will render her indifference for indifference, contempt for contempt, neglect for neglect. I will not cause My common graces to fail her; My providence shall be justified towards her; I will give her those ordinary graces, with which she may combat, and, notwithstanding which, she will be overcome. But, as for those special and choice graces, which are not due her and are not promised, those powerful and efficacious helps, which enable the soul to do the good that they show her, that move the will and lead to happy perseverance; I will deprive her of them; I will give them to others who will make better use of them. "It is a just punishment," says St. Francis of Sales, "that they who abuse grace should be deprived of it, and that they who will not do the good they know, should not know what is good."

Consider the frightful state into which a religious falls, who is indocile to grace. She no longer knows the way she should go and walks in darkness, without seeing the goal towards which she tends. She no longer hears the voice of God, and refuses the sacrifices required for the perfection of her state. She even makes to herself a false conscience, no longer studying its spirit and engagements.

She does not examine the motive that animates her, for fear of being troubled at the sight of what she would be obliged to reform. She congratulates herself that she is not scrupulous or constrained. She takes credit to herself for not being like those who aspire to a greater good. "We must go simply," she says, "without cavilling about trifles. God is not so severe as to make a crime

out of nothing. With what can I be reproached in the abuse, you say, I make of grace? Only some affection for earthly things, a slight attachment to little conveniences, useless words, thoughts and looks, a simple curiosity which zeal excites, piety seeks, the love of my country or religion animates and sanctifies; a witty speech, a joke upon natural and well known defects. Cannot one be holy without continually restraining herself? Must we give up every pleasure? No! no! that is not the voice of God, but the effect of a heated imagination, which is taken for inspiration."

Oh, how many religious have been seduced by this fatal reasoning! How many have been lost! For reprobation is often a fatal consequence of the abuse of grace. Without doubt, God wishes to save all men, but He does not destine them all to the same degree of elevation and glory. In calling us to heaven He appoints us the place and rank which we are to occupy; either we shall never enter there, or we shall have no other place or rank. In consequence, God prepares for us the graces we need, and proportions them to His designs over us, fixing their precise number. The only means of securing our salvation is to correspond to the helps He gives us, and of which He fixes the measure, that we may attain the degree of perfection which is to conduct us to the rank He destines for us in heaven. Otherwise, we miss our salvation and renounce the treasure of glory with which He wishes to enrich us in heaven.

Shall a religious complain of the high perfection to which our Lord calls her and which He requires of her? Ah! would this not be to complain of the singular bounties He lavishes upon her? He demands of her so much sanctity, only that He may give her a more precious crown; He wishes her to be more perfect, only that He may render her more glorious. He requires more fidelity, because He has more love for her.

Second Point.

How striking is this truth, O my God! It is not enough for me not to be guilty of sin, even to be faithful to my

state and its duties ; it is also necessary that this fidelity be full, and answer to the grace that inspires me. It is not enough that Thou find me at my last hour with my hands filled with good works ; they will be good in Thine eyes only inasmuch as they have the goodness Thou dost expect of them. It is not enough for me to omit nothing ; the character of my exactitude must correspond to the character of the graces with which Thou hast favored me. Otherwise my best works will bear no character of life, because they will be destitute of the fervor that is to merit for them the degree of sanctity to which I am called.

My God ! how often have I frustrated the designs of Thy grace over my soul, and rendered myself more criminal than persons in the world, because Thou hast shown me more signal favors ! Thou didst expect from me high sanctity, singular gratitude, particular glory, and I have been rebellious to this destiny. Thy anger has succeeded to Thy love, Thy justice to Thy mercy, sterility to fecundity. What remains to me in the sad state to which I see myself reduced ? What a subject of confusion for me ! How many delays, infidelities, revolts, and inspirations neglected, resolutions broken ! How many words of life heard without profit ! How many graces, of which I have rendered myself unworthy by the abuse I have made of those which would have won them for me ! Oh, if only I had been faithful, what a store I would now possess ! How many have I lost by my little attention to good works ! How often have I rejected or stifled that divine seed, and prevented it from producing the fruits of justice and salvation which are attached thereto ! How often have I extinguished that bright light, that showed me the good I ought to do and the evil I ought to avoid, and deadened the sacred fire that warmed me ! Lo, to what a frightful indigence has negligence reduced my poor soul ! What purity, what innocence, what love would fill my heart if I had been faithful to the divine mercy ! Ah ! Lord, dost Thou not already exercise upon me that secret vengeance which, being invisible, is but the more dreadful ? Thou dost punish my infidelities by the subtraction of Thy graces.

I no longer experience certain attractions, certain sweetnesses of Thy bounty, certain reproaches of my conscience, certain delights in Thy service. Where is the divine light that formerly illumined me? Where are the holy desires that animated me? What has become of those sweet alarms? Nothing any longer troubles me, nothing moves me, rules, good examples, salutary advice, all split against the hardness of my heart. Alas! have I not reason to think that the talents which Thou hast confided to me, and which I have rendered useless, have been taken from me and given to others who will profit by them? I see my sisters making daily progress in virtue, I see them advancing in the way of perfection. What recollection, regularity, obedience, mortification, meekness, humility and fervor they manifest! Thou dost reward their fidelity, and punish my ingratitude.

Must I then experience the chastisement of the unfaithful servant, who buried Thy talent? and the blindness of the faithless Jerusalem, which did not profit by Thy words, Thy holy visits? Oh my God, I willingly submit to Thy vengeance, but exercise upon me any other punishment; however rigorous it may be, it will be for me a new favor. Strike! I am willing for this, but strike as a Father, Who always remembers mercy; strike as a judge if Thou wilt, but in that justice which never forgets mercy; strike not in that hatred, which would cast me into hell. Wilt Thou then abandon me, O Lord? I deserve it, but hast Thou not other punishments in the treasury of Thy divine anger? Why abandon me to my infidelities? Where are the bowels of Thy paternal goodness? Where those mighty graces which the hardness of the most insensible hearts cannot resist? What has become of that zeal, that eager desire Thou hadst for my salvation? I know that I have stopped the course of Thy grace, but have I dried up its inexhaustible source? Is it on my account or Thine own, that Thou art good? Thou wilt always be our Father, as long as Jesus Christ, Thy adorable Son, continues to be our brother. Behold His labors, listen to His cries, look upon His wounds. Why harden my heart? Why take from me Thy holy fear? Is it thus a father punishes? I am worse than I was in the world, where I knew Thee

not, and the world and my passions ruled me. Ah! let the arm of Thy justice be shortened; return to me for the sake of so many of Thy faithful servants, with whom I have the happiness of living, for the sake of my holy founders, who have promised Thee in their Order a family of saints. Despise not, O Lord, a contrite and humbled heart. Ah! this sentiment of sorrow that I feel can only be the effect of Thy grace; no less than this retreat, this present moment, when Thou dost speak to me, when Thou dost enlighten my understanding, strengthen my will and reanimate my hope; I feel rising in my heart a lively fear and confidence. Since Thy voice frightens and reanimates me, I know Thou hast not abandoned me. Give me time and I will pay Thee all. Thou alone wilt be forever the God of my heart. I will give myself up truly and forever to Thy guidance. I will no longer oppose Thy tender advances to my soul.

I will abandon myself to the impulse of Thy grace, I will be attentive to follow its secret movements, I will be docile to its heavenly lights and sensible to its holy ardor. Gratitude will support my fidelity. Shall I fear to yield too much to the attractions of my God, whilst this God of goodness, notwithstanding my abuse of His grace, still pursues me? What does He ask of me? My heart? and in return for so little that He exacts and eagerly receives, when it is offered with love, He gives Himself as a reward; can I do too much to repair my losses and secure so rich a possession?

Oh God, Who dost form in me these desires, support them by Thy grace. Enable me to execute with fidelity all that Thy goodness inspires. Animate me in the practice of the virtues that Thou dost require, and I will embrace them with all my strength. I will watch continually over my interior to observe the lights, good thoughts, inspirations, and holy affections, that Thou wilt deign to communicate to me. I will strengthen myself against the weakness of my nature that abhors what is difficult or opposed to it; that stifles the movements of Thy grace, fearing to enter too deeply into the exercises of piety and mortification. I will labor at my perfection, according to the greatness of Thy benefits and my obligations. All my life, I will weep

over the loss of the time, I have so badly employed. I will so use all the moments that remain, that there may be no voids in my life, and that I may attain the degree of sanctity I am obliged to acquire that I may be saved.

SECOND DAY.

CONFERENCE.—ON RELIGIOUS VIGILANCE.

“WHAT I say to you, I say to all: Watch.”—Mark xiii., 37.

It is not enough to hate sin, we must avoid the occasions of it. It is not enough not to abuse grace, we must profit by it, and it is only by vigilance, the source of every merit and the principle of all sanctity, that we can abstain from what God forbids, and do what He commands. It is only by entering into ourselves, by examining the secret dispositions of our souls, by sounding all the folds of our hearts, that we can avoid evil, do good, and acquire graces, merits, and inspirations from God.

The certainty of salvation is not the privilege of a soul placed by God Himself in religion. She may be lost there at any hour, because she is not sheltered from every danger. The only means of escape is to be vigilant and take proper measures against surprise.

A continual vigilance is necessary to guard against the deceits of her own heart, always leagued with her passions to delude her. Without vigilance, she will mistake timidity for the true fear of God, a horror of the consequences of sin for horror of sin itself; the esteem of virtue for a love of virtue; the sentiment of grace for a consent to grace; vain wishes for a sincere will; desires of conversion for a true conversion. To avoid these disorders a scrupulous watchfulness is necessary. In a word, her salvation and her progress are the result of vigilance.

“Watch over your heart,” says the Holy Scripture, because from it life proceeds; watch over your senses, “because through them death enters the soul.” This circumspection should be much the greater for a religious,

as her heart is a sanctuary in which the Lord wishes to dwell, and that closed garden of Scripture, in which He wishes to take delight. What a difference between a vigilant and a dissipated soul in religion! The latter has daily in her hands the most precious treasures, and she wastes them; a number of talents which she might make produce a hundred fold, and she buries them. She might every moment take a new step toward heaven, and she draws back; she might attach to her crown as many precious stones as she has duties to fulfil, and she even suffers the crown itself to be taken from her. As nothing is more unknown to her than her own heart, she avoids considering the source of the faults she commits. Nothing is more usual than to hear her attribute the cause of them to what she thinks she sees defective in the conduct of her sisters towards her. They—if we believe her,—occasion all her hastiness, her humor and her wilfulness. Every thing must bend to her will. All others experience her impatience. She is always in the right; to contradict her is to touch those mountains that cast up fire and brimstone; she sees no passions in herself, but only in others; such conduct removes her farther and farther from perfection. She cannot have the spirit of prayer, for, going to it with her imagination full of the pretended faults that have been committed against her, she spends her time in judging and condemning her neighbor, and in justifying in her own eyes all her actions. Such a prayer drives peace from her soul, and she comes from it with bitterness in her heart and trouble in her mind. From this fatal and painful situation produced by her lack of vigilance, comes that facility with which she dispenses herself from a number of exercises, and the negligence and tepidity with which she acquits herself of others. Prayers without preparation, respect or devotion; spiritual reading without attention or fruit; superficial examinations of conscience which never lead to change of heart; confessions without contrition or amendment, followed by continual relapses, so that it seems as if she confesses only to sin, and sins only to confess; communions without faith or love, devotion or profit; these make up her life. She daily eats the Bread of the strong and remains in her weaknesses; she

unites herself corporally to the Flesh of Jesus Christ, and never acquires that union of mind and heart with Him, which should be the effect of a good communion.

Thus, by a deplorable misfortune, the tepid and negligent religious makes what should be the means of her perfection, obstacles to her salvation; the graces that God gives her, the ordinary matter of her sins; her very confessions the source of her reprobation. God, Who never entirely withdraws from the sinner, does not abandon her but insensibly withdraws His gifts. She is no longer touched by what formerly struck her. The sun of justice still shines, but no longer in a clear and serene noon-day; she perceives it, but it is only through the mists of passion, which thicken more and more. God still says to her: "I will," He commands, but this negligent and dissipated soul turns away her attention or answers, like the shade of Samuel, "Why do you torment me?" In this fatal disposition, she habitually yields to little faults, and is but too much disposed to yield to greater. She relapses more and more, is disgusted with piety, rejects grace; to-day she quits one practise, to-morrow she omits another. She has less and less recollection, more repugnance for good, more propensity to evil. The burden of religion becomes heavy to her, its yoke oppressive; she carries it, or rather drags it, and soon she becomes as irregular, as she had formerly been exact and virtuous.

What is the cause of so frightful an evil? The want of vigilance, a voluntary dissipation, a prayer omitted, a practise neglected, an exercise abandoned; behold the commencement! Movements of grace despised, remorse of conscience stifled, behold the progress! A more marked infidelity, a more grievous fault, continued relapses behold the fatal result. Where will it end?

How very different is the conduct of a religious and vigilant soul! She is always occupied in watching over her movements, in combating her passions, in mortifying her inclinations, in directing all her steps in the paths of justice. We see in all her proceedings the same equality, recollection and fervor, the same charity and fidelity to her God. We would think that sensible objects produce in her no sensation. She watches so carefully over her

heart, that she seems to avert at ease all harmful impressions. This vigilance renders her attentive to the different movements of nature and grace, which so few discern. She destroys the former and cultivates the latter. Skilful in distinguishing the voice of her Spouse, she runs at the least sign of His will. Careful to profit by the sacrifices which each day brings her, she amasses a fund of treasures. She has duties to fulfil, among which are difficult and painful ones; there are cares to be taken, attentions to give, a thousand different occupations, a thousand subjections. How many disquietudes and embarrassments does she meet! But accustomed to break her will, to contradict her inclinations, nothing seems to incommode, disquiet, vex, or displease her; she takes everything in view of God and according to His spirit. The most common actions are performed through a supernatural motive. Everything is offered, everything is sanctified, everything is meritorious. Do not fear that this vigilance will destroy peace and union with her sisters. No, on the contrary, it perfects these gifts. A soul thus recollected is burdensome to no one, and is universally loved. In her are no traits of humor, she exacts no attentions, no deferences. She has to treat with different characters, some amiable, others only calculated to exercise patience. She complains of no one, overcomes herself, represses her resentments, hides what she feels, and makes everything contribute to her sanctification. But, within herself, how many occasions of sacrifice does she not find! How many weeds spring up in her own garden! She carefully plucks them up as soon as they appear. She incessantly arms herself against her own heart, her vanity, vivacity, and sensibility; she is silent when she would wish to speak; speaks, when she would wish to be silent, renounces her tastes, overcomes her repugnances, arrests her sallies, governs her humors, submits her judgment; in a word, she restrains and overcomes herself without showing it exteriorly. If she is in a state of discouragement, dejection, weariness, in which without knowing why, she is disquieted, troubled, or agitated, she does not by the recital of her pains, fatigue those in whom she would find an insensibility that must aggra-

vate her wounds, or an interest that would increase them. In the secret of her heart, she offers her crosses to God, Who alone can give her consolation. She knows that suffering is compared to a precious liquor, that loses its virtue when exposed to the air. She has recourse to God alone. She esteems herself happy to be able to give Him every day some pledge of her love, and that He deigns to receive such feeble proofs of it. And what favors does not this remunerating God lavish upon her. Supernatural gifts, a lively faith, tender devotion, love of prayer, profound peace, joy of the Holy Spirit, power over His own heart, over His love; prayers infallibly heard for herself and others; such is the portion of this pure and faithful soul.

If we were permitted to penetrate into that sanctuary, to which God alone is admitted, and watched, what wonders would we not discern! What graces of God would we not discover lavished upon this soul, which has no movement, no desire, no ardor, but to please Him. What facility in conversing with Him! Prayer is her delight, her element, her life! In it she banishes from her mind everything of earth. What an intimate union with the God of her heart, with Jesus Christ! How many precious merits this holy intercourse brings her. For her, no actions are indifferent; the most natural are worthy of an infinite reward. By her constant fidelity, she acquires at every step a new degree of light to know God more clearly, a new degree of love to love Him more perfectly. Such is the happiness of a vigilant soul, faithful to the movements of grace. Such was in particular St. Chantal, that precious model of a religious of the Visitation. It was by her vigilance, that she attained the high degree of sanctity that merited for her the glory she now enjoys in heaven, and the veneration decreed her by the Church, in placing her upon its altars. Could she have known the designs of God over her otherwise than by applying herself to the study of them? Would she have had strength to conquer nature and the senses, if she had not understood the necessity of it? and could she have done this without consulting God, without entering into herself continually, without watching over all her

movements? Could she have practised the vow to do what was most perfect,—that vow so difficult to fulfil, without the greatest circumspection over her heart, her actions, discourses and proceedings, her whole conduct? What fruit did not her vigilance produce in her soul! How many virtues did it not make her practise and with what perfection. In a few words she said much; often she answered by silence, economizing her words and moments, so as to give them only through necessity, utility and charity. She avoided curiosity, and did not gratify that of others. She was serious without moroseness, grave without haughtiness; she had only humble sentiments of herself, and always respected and esteemed her neighbor. She saw in herself only defects; in others only virtues. In the infirmities of her sisters she saw only her own miseries. She reproved them with charity, received their advice with great sweetness and gratitude; gave pain to none, and was willing to suffer from all. Her discourses were seasoned with that Christian meekness which humility produces. She avenged injuries only by benefits, regulated her dispositions and conduct towards others neither by antipathy nor sympathy, but by the principles of charity. She exercised this virtue more willingly with the persons that pleased her least, because she then exercised it in a pure manner; in fine, she saw God alone in her neighbor. It was her vigilance over self, that taught her to act no longer according to the sentiments of nature and the senses, but according to faith, neither to seek herself nor others, but God alone; to make the desire of pleasing Him her only virtue, the Gospel her principal study, prayer her element, patience her exercise, humility her glory, annihilation her greatness, mortification her strength, goodness her character, the love of God her treasure, the Rules and Constitutions her second Gospel, the Cross her consolation, and a life of sacrifices her eternal crown. It was her vigilance that withdrew her senses from dissipation, collected her spiritual powers and fixed them on God, in Whom she found her repose and felicity. Thence, those consoling entertainments with the Supreme Being, those continual movements which succeeded each

other in her heart by acts of gratitude, adoration, offering, humility, compunction and love, of which she formed an interior language, which she never suffered to be interrupted. Thence, that intimate union, that sacred intimacy with Jesus Christ, so that she thought only of Him and acted only for Him. This divine Saviour lived in her, wrought by her, governed her memory, regulated her imagination, instructed her understanding, inspired her will and inflamed her heart with that heavenly fire, which He came to bring on earth. Thus, her vigilance filled her whole life, rendered her conduct luminous by the simplicity of a pure intention, and loaded her with merits and glory. Thus, vigilance is indispensable for each of her daughters, who should, as she did, aspire to the perfection of so holy a state.

It is enough, O my God! After the example of my holy Mother, I will watch over my mind, examine its sentiments and maxims, that I may act always through reason, prudence, and discretion; that I may not see and hear things that do not concern me, and take no part in amusements that I should avoid.

I will watch over my heart to examine its dispositions and see, O Lord, if it seeks Thee in truth; if Thou alone art its Master; if Thou alone art its beloved object.

I will watch over my senses, over my powers, interior and exterior, that all may be measured and regulated according to Thee, by Thee and for Thee.

I will watch over the nature and end of my actions, to animate them by fervor, and perform them in Thy divine presence with a pure intention, which will have Thee for its principle and end.

I will watch over my defects, especially over those habitual ones, which most favor my inclinations, over those essential defects, which everybody perceives, and which I alone have not seen, because I have not watched sufficiently over my conduct, or which if I have known, I have excused by a thousand pretexts.

I will watch over the employment of my time, to let no moment escape without fruit, because it is the means by which we purchase eternity, because there is not in my life a single instant, to which Thy mercy has not attached

some special grace on earth, and destined some special glory in heaven.

I will watch over the occasions of practising virtue to let none escape, that I may not lose the infinite treasure of graces which they will accumulate for me, if I profit by them. I will take advantage of everything to go to Thee; I will make use of the good and bad dispositions of my body and mind, of the few or many talents which Thou hast confided to me, of all the events that happen upon earth either to me or to others. I will profit by everything to approach Thee and to unite myself incessantly to Thee.

I will watch over temptations, that I may not suffer myself to be surprised by the enemy, who incessantly goes about seeking to destroy me, that I may discover his pernicious designs and oppose them with invincible firmness.

I will watch over the use I ought to make of grace, in order to correspond with fidelity to its whole extent, because according to my holy founder, we reject all if we do not receive all.

In fine I will watch over my whole self without relaxation, that I may ever be in readiness to quit this life, and appear before Thy tribunal, that I may not be surprised, and may always be ready, and in that state in which I would wish death to find me.

THIRD DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.—ON DEATH.

First Point.

“IN all thy works, remember thy last end, and thou wilt never sin.—Eccles, vii., 40.

We deviate from our end by sin and the abuse of grace; we approach it by the habitual thought of death.

Death is the passage from this life to another, in which the soul is stripped of all that is earthly, and finds God alone, Who will be her eternal happiness or unhappiness,

according to the good or bad use she shall have made of His law.

As death is certain, so is the hour uncertain; and yet, we live in a criminal security. By a fatal contradiction we comfort ourselves about death, which is surely most certain, as if we believed it uncertain; and in regard to the time of death, and the state in which it will find us, concerning both of which are most ignorant, we act as if we were fully informed. The thunderbolt is about to strike us, our conscience is sullied with sin, and we are tranquil. We would not wish to die in our present state, and we do not labor to quit it. We are warned that we shall reap only what we have sown, and our works are not more worthy of God. Still more, the thought of death, so necessary for the regulation of life, is regarded with horror; to give oneself up to it is considered melancholy.

A true religious deplures this fatal conduct of the children of the world. As she aspires only to the possession of her God, and has more cause to desire than to fear the breaking of life's chains, she never forgets the last hour which is to fix her eternal fate. All her thoughts turn towards this term. She often looks at the dust upon which she walks and says to herself, behold what I will become. She often interrogates herself upon what might disquiet her at that last hour, and sets things in order. She retires to rest in the disposition in which she would wish to die, and dies daily, that she may have nothing to do at the hour of death. After the example of Jesus Christ, she does not disquiet herself as to the time, place or circumstances of her death. The best time is when God wills it. Whilst awaiting His will, she performs all her actions, as she would wish to perform the last of her life. She judges of things as she would at her death; not according to the claims of her senses, but by the light of Faith. Thus, securing her salvation by her works, she desires her end rather than fears it; she looks upon the tomb as a crib from which, dying to earth, she will pass to heaven. If death, always frightful to human nature, excites some alarms in her heart, they are mitigated by her ardent desires of being united to God in a blessed eternity. She fears the judgments of God, because her

frailties appear to her enormous ; but she earnestly wishes to possess Him, to love Him. Humility forms her fears, but love inflames and excites her desires, and this love triumphs over her alarms. She is continually ready to make to God this last sacrifice, which is to crown all the others she has made through life with so much generosity. If death strikes suddenly, this true religious dies as man would have died in the state of innocence ; from life she passes to glory. If death comes slowly she profits by time. She learns with pleasure, that she is soon to go into the house of the Lord. With what respect, faith and confidence, she receives the helps of the Church ! Numberless graces fix her immutably in the love of Jesus Christ crucified, Whom she has before her eyes. Like Him, the remembrance of what she has done to obey and glorify God, and the certainty of finding in her Judge a Father sustains her. If the judgments of God frighten her, the state of her divine Saviour, abandoned on the Cross, strengthens her. If the demon makes the last effort to drive her to despair, faith, the goodness of God, the merits of her Saviour, and her own actions reassure her. The past, the present and the future all give her answers of life. In the past, she sees, with joy and gratitude, the gifts of God, her labors and victories. In the present she enjoys the most perfect peace, the fruit of her fidelity to all her duties. The future offers her only crowns ; she hopes in her God, Whom she has faithfully loved and served. She is ready to remit her soul into the bosom of her divine Spouse, to be there happily consumed, holily purified in the flames of an eternal love. In these sentiments, she receives from Jesus Christ a foretaste of the felicity which awaits her ; her faith casts a last lustre before it is lost in the light of glory ; her hope becomes more lively at the sight of the blessing she is about to possess ; and her charity is consummated by being united to that of the blessed. What has she to regret ? The world ? It has been to her a strange land ; she knew it only to sacrifice it ; she spoke of it only to condemn its maxims ; she was seen by it, only through necessity. Does she regret her family ? She had separated herself from them, saw them only through duty, and spoke of

them only to God. Her friends? She has had true ones only in religion, in God and for God. I leave you, she says to them in dying, as Jesus Christ said to His Apostles shortly before His death, but it is only for a time, we will soon be reunited never to be separated. Does she regret her body? She has reduced it to servitude. Does she regret her life? Jesus Christ alone has been her life. What then can death take from her? She has broken not only the ties that attached her to exterior objects, but also those which might have attached her to herself. Death is then a gain for her; far from taking anything from her, it gives her all. It delivers her from her fears, removes her from danger, sets her at liberty, terminates her sufferings, commences her happiness. Who will give me, she exclaims with transport, who will give me the wings of a dove to fly away and rest in the bosom of my God! Her joy is imprinted on her countenance. Her perfect serenity dispels all the fear ordinarily inspired by the agonizing. We see there the presage of her approaching happiness. She expires in the kiss of the Lord; hers is the death of the just.

But what a different fate, I will not say for one who has constantly dishonored God and her state, and led a scandalous life, but for one who has been tepid, negligent, and dissipated, whose relaxed life seemed to say to God, that His yoke was too hard, and His burden too heavy; who did not remember her last hour; performed her duties only in part; dragged her cross instead of carrying it; made no efforts to overcome herself in anything; who, in a word, lived in too natural a manner. At this decisive moment, the bandage of self-love is torn from her eyes; truths of faith upon which she so carelessly meditated appear to her in their full light. She now feels the obligation of her vows, her rules and her observances, so much the more as she hitherto sought to avoid their severity. She sees things in quite a different light. What she regarded as scruples, she now looks upon as essential faults. She sees crime where she scarcely perceived doubt, and doubt, in what she believed a virtue. In a long time spent in religion, perhaps she does not find a shadow of solid virtue, scarcely faith and the fear of God. Her confessions do

not comfort her. Her frequent communions frighten her. She has lived without reflecting on her errors, and she now perceives only a frivolous amusement in her life, vain occupations, sins without repentance, loss of time without reparation, idleness, indifference, and neglect of God. How will she expiate so many faults, so many omissions, and, above all, such unpardonable tepidity in the service of Jesus Christ. Everything serves to increase her pain. A past, lost and irreparable; a present, too short; a future without end; what she ought to have done, and what she has done; the debts she has contracted, and the Judge before Whom she must appear; the account she has to render, and the sentence she must hear; troubled and overwhelmed, her tepidity is still the same; the interests, the glory and the love of God touch her but feebly. Her mind and her heart are torn by turns with the fear of God, yet without the vivacity of love; by a separation from a small number of friends, as tepid and irregular as herself; by regrets for her family from whom she was separated in body, but not in effect; by the dissolution of a body for which she had procured all she could without grievous sin; and by the loss of a life, which she had endeavored to render easy and agreeable, although a penitential life in itself. Thus the soul of a tepid and relaxed religious falls into the hands of an outraged father, a dishonored spouse, an implacable judge, an inflexible God. Oh what a death! How dreadful!

Second Point.

Would it be too much, O my God! to put a constraint upon myself, all my life, to avoid such a fate as an unhappy end, and to purchase the peace of the just at my last hour! I know that I shall die, and that each instant of my life may be the last. I know that in dying, I shall die to everything, and that everything shall die to me. I know that upon the moment of my death depends a whole eternity, and that I shall die as I have lived. I know that I will be forever, what I will be at the moment of death, a friend or an enemy of God. How is it, that the salutary thoughts which induced me to embrace the religious state

do not render me more regular, more mortified, more humble, more charitable, in a word more religious? Why do they not lead me to die in anticipation to all those things of which death must necessarily deprive me? To embrace without reserve, the virtues which a sudden death will not leave me time to practise? To be always in the state, in which I should wish to die, and to secure a holy death by a holy life? May Thy grace, O my God, enable me to quit the dreadful state of tepidity in which I have so long languished, and the danger of which I now see more clearly than ever. What a frightful position, for me whom Thou has so liberally favored, is that with which Thou dost threaten me, to punish my ingratitude and the abuse I have made of Thy graces! What more frightful, what more terrible than these alarms, these troubles to which Thou dost abandon a tepid and relaxed religious! Alas! have I then left the world, only to be at death as uncertain of my salvation as I have been all my life? Have I voluntarily buried myself in the cloister, as in a species of tomb, only to have more horror, more fear of that which will one day receive me? Have I embraced a state which is in itself a continual preparation for death, only to be less prepared, more surprised at that moment? Will I have had so often before my eyes, the consoling spectacle of many of my sisters, so fervent in those moments which terminated their exile, only to have those, who will assist at my death-bed, witnesses of my tepidity and scandalous negligence. Let me die the death of the just, and let my last end be like theirs. But, in vain will I wish to end my life like the saints, if I do not think of sanctifying myself as they did. Let me live then, O Lord, the life of the just. May I live as a penitent that I may die as a saint. Ah! whatever it may cost me, whatever vain pretexts that nature may allege, I will no longer live to myself, nor for myself: nothing shall turn me aside from Thee. My heart, my mind shall all be for Thee, and my soul surrounded by two eternities, will no longer hesitate between heaven and hell; it will secure its salvation by good works. I will detach myself from all to fix on Thee all my affections, for it is into Thy hands I must fall when all others will abandon me.

My whole life shall flow, little by little, drop by drop, so to say, into Thy adorable bosom, until it be lost in Thee and not in creatures. The quality of victim is inseparable from the title I bear; I have neglected its duties. In the future I will fulfil them more perfectly, and my wretched self love, which has almost destroyed the holocaust I have offered Thee of my heart, shall henceforth be enchained until it receives from Thy hand the stroke of death.

To accomplish these engagements, which I renew to-day with Thee, my God, the thoughts of death shall continually occupy my mind; and that this thought may make more impression on me, I will often go, in spirit, to the place where I am to repose after death. I will descend, in spirit, into the tombs of those who have preceded me, and who, sleeping there, teach me to die to all, that I may find nothing new in the dark region which awaits me. Finally, O my God, I take the resolution to live henceforth, as one who may die at any moment; to live no longer, but as one ready to die, or already dead.

First. Not to lose the precious remembrance of death, I will each hour, say to myself, this moment, wherein so many are surprised by death, is perhaps the last for me, and on this moment may depend my eternity.

Second. I will perform each of my actions as if it was really to terminate my life; I will fulfil my duties, as though I had immediately to render an account of them. I will often recall the example of a holy religious, who, constantly faithful to this practice, said: "if I knew I should die on leaving this recreation, I would not leave it to go elsewhere," or rather. I will imitate the example of another saint, who exercised himself unceasingly in dying. Every month, or at least once a year, I will take a day to accomplish all that I should do at the last moment of my life. On that day I will make an exact review of my conscience, a fervent communion, with all the acts which belong to the reception of holy Viaticum; I will recite the prayers of Extreme Unction, those of the agonizing, those which the Church offers for the dead, and those which are fitted for the dying. I will go, in spirit, before the tribunal of God. I will try to reply to His

reproaches, or rather I will hear my terrible sentence, and will return to my occupations as one restored, by the grace of God, from the gates of hell to do penance.

Third. I will live as one dead, I will place myself in the state of a corpse that is not yet buried, that takes no interest in what passes around it, that is insensible to all ceremonies, receives honors with indifference and is moved by nothing; that is to say, I will annihilate my powers by the most perfect detachment; I will repulse all that can divide my heart and affections; I will accustom myself to have only necessary intercourse with creatures; I will despoil myself of all that is not strictly necessary. If I find it difficult to attain this degree of virtue, I will say to myself; “will not the joy of dying without pain be sufficient recompense for the pain needed to attain it?” I will solicit the grace of my Saviour and Model, Who will support my efforts; I will animate myself by the examples, and these words of my holy founder: “I desire but few things in this world, and these few I desire but little.”

THIRD DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.—ON THE LAST JUDGMENT.

First Point.

“ARISE ye dead and come to judgment!”

Happy the religious who animates herself to combat and to victory, by the remembrance of the angel's trumpet, which is to summon all men before the tribunal of the sovereign Judge, there to receive the reward of their works. More happy she, who, without stopping at the terrors of the last judgment, often thinks of the things upon which she will be judged! On that dreadful day, the principal matter of the examen will be the graces and means of salvation, that have been lavished on her. God will demand an account of the precious gift of her voca-

tion, of that talent which was confided to her, of the inspirations and lights which she has received, of those Rules and Constitutions which should have placed between her and sin an infinite distance, and of all those good sentiments and movements, which urged her to tend to perfection. He will demand an account of His body and blood, which so often nourished her; of her prayers, and readings, and especially her vows; of that secret remorse which He, Himself, excited in her heart, to bring her back to Him, when she had gone astray. What can a soul answer, who has acted according to her caprices, and not according to her duties; who has abused so great a predilection; who has drawn no fruit from an approach to the sacraments; who instead of holy readings has made but useless ones; who has always given favorable interpretations to the transgression of her vows; who has omitted, or done badly, the good she was inspired to do, neglected the virtues she should have practiced, wasted the graces she should have put to profit, lost the merits she should have accumulated? What shall she think when, enlightened by a divine light, she sees so many sins committed with deliberation, or through a wilful ignorance; so many faults because of her little vigilance; her quickness in judging, suspecting, speaking; so many habits contracted by self-love, humor, curiosity, vanity, delicacy and sensibility; so many evils caused by her example, and her discourses; so many actions performed only through policy, fear and human respect. What will she say when she sees so much vanity in her words, so much tepidity in her prayers, laxity in her duties, eagerness in her zeal, natural compassion in her charity, moderation in her temperament and not in her heart, silence of pure policy in her sufferings, of ill humor in her solitude and above all so many relapses into faults? The day will come when all her illusions will be dissipated, when an exact and enlightened justice will show her to herself. What will she think when all her sins shall appear before her in all their enormity? The eye of her Judge will penetrate to the very bottom of her heart, and as St. Paul says, to the very marrow of her soul, to lay open by a minute detail,

thought by thought, desire by desire, intention by intention, word by word, and day by day, hour by hour, instant by instant. Then each of her actions will be presented to her with all their particular circumstances ; all will be recalled, without the whole diminishing in any manner the real extent of each part. Humiliating revelation, overwhelming manifestation made by God, that is to say a sovereign Avenger, Whom mercy will no longer accompany, Whom compassion will no longer touch ; in Whom all is infinite, without limit and without measure, —anger and wrath as well as goodness and mercy ! What will be the terror of this religious soul before a God, Who sees blemishes in His angels ? Ah ! if she were then mortal she would wither away with fear. No more mercy ; now is the commencement of the immortal reign of an eternal and rigorous justice. The very sight of that infinitely amiable Jesus, Whom she would not and can no longer love, will be more insupportable than the torments which await her. As long as she lived, she could appeal from His justice to His love, but now His love yields to justice. From Saviour, brother, friend and Spouse, Jesus Christ now becomes her acuser, her witness and her judge. God had erected in her heart a tribunal composed of reason, to judge an interior sentiment to denounce and depose, truth to convince and pronounce. This tribunal was in her a portion of the divine nature and an emanation of eternal justice. It will remove the bandage from her eyes, will enlighten her on her disorders and will summon her against herself. What more deplorable than to be accused, recognized by one's self as guilty and inexcusable before a God sovereignly irritated, without defence before an omnipotent and avenging God ? But what new kind of testimony will be that of this religious soul against herself ? Unanswerable evidence ! Nothing can elude it, because it will be free from all prejudice ; it cannot be corrupted by any passion. Cruel evidence ! it cannot exculpate her on the plea of ignorance ; she could not be ignorant without crime, of that which she could not commit or omit without crime. Nor can it excuse her on the plea of

weakness. She would have been able to overcome, had not her tepidity prevented her from combating. Nor on the plea of assistance; millions of pagans, an infinity of christians have had neither as powerful, nor as frequent aid; nor on the plea of example, custom, or human respect; these pretexts, far from excusing her, will render her still more guilty. Inexcusable in her own eyes, she will turn to God, Who is about to sentence her, to take vengeance in His own hands. This God is to be avenged, and avenged as God. He can be so only by a judgment formed by her against herself. What greatness in God, but what bitterness for this soul! What greatness in God; He will turn His will, and force Himself to recognize that He is no longer free to pardon her, that He can no longer show her mercy. What bitterness for this soul! Although the terrible judgment that she feels is sufficiently justified in itself, she will also be constrained to justify it in measure, and at the time that she will endure its rigors and feel its blows; she would oppose the grace that God would wish to give her if she could; she will animate His vengeance and execute upon herself His sentence of death. This is not all; given up to the divine vengeance, she would in vain call for help, everything would be deaf to her voice; all is leagued against her. The voice of Jesus Christ alone is heard. Obstinate sinner, will He say to her; I was silent, and you were emboldened by my silence; I waited for you and you despised Me; behold, the time of my vengeance is come! Acknowledge at last, what has been my patience towards you; you have abused it; it must judge you to-day and avenge Me! Look at this Cross, still stained with My blood! Behold the proof of My love and your ingratitude! Behold the glorious instrument by which I wished to save you, and which is about to become the judge of your reprobation! This blood-stained Cross opened for you the way to heaven by combats and constraints. You had placed yourself under its standard, but like a coward, you deserted and preferred hell. I had purchased you at the price of My blood. But you contemned Me. Put your hands in these wounds, measure their depth, and see what My love has made Me endure

for you. Your salvation should have flowed from them, since it was for you that I suffered them. You refused to draw from these sacred sources ; now they cry out for vengeance against you. To manifest to you the immense love of My heart, to conduct you to that fountain of all graces, love had opened for you My sacred side ; but in spite of all the efforts of My tenderness, in spite of all My threats, you did not choose to enter it. Hard and unfeeling soul ! This heart shall be closed against you forever. You shall pay for My blood, My life, My death, My body, My soul, My word, My graces and My sacraments, which you have abused. You shall pay for them by your own death in eternal fire. Immortal object of execration to My angels and My saints, for the reprobate, and even for the demons themselves, you shall be eternally without love for Me ; you are no longer mine, and I will no longer be your God. I wished to be your felicity, I will be your eternal unhappiness. You would not burn with My love, you shall be devoured by the flames of hell. Hell was not prepared for you, but for the demons ; you have had the same heart, you shall have the same fate.

Second Point.

What a sentence, O my God ! How shall I bear to hear it ? Yet, if I do not reform, I shall draw it upon myself, by the tepid life I am leading, as well as by my resistance to grace, and my little advancement in virtue notwithstanding Thy inspirations, by the little profit I have drawn from the sacraments, by my vanity, dissipation, irregularity ; by my many falls and continual relapses. Ah ! Lord, enlighten me with that bright light, which will come forth from Thy throne on the great day of Thy vengeance, that guided by this divine light, I may now purify myself by the most sincere penance ; grant that I may avoid the inflexible rigor of Thy justice, which condemns without appeal, and punishes without delay, by appealing to the tenderness of Thy mercy, whilst it is yet open to me. I will fear that terrible day, that I may prepare for it, before it arrives ; I will prepare for it, that I may not fear it when it comes. That I may not then dread Thy presence I will

seek it now. That I may not fear Thy Cross then, I will now carry and love it. To spare myself the confusion of Thy judgment, I will enter unceasingly into the secrecy of my heart ; I will weigh and regulate all its affections. I will condemn and punish myself unsparingly at present, that hereafter I may not hear Thy terrible sentence. I will familiarize myself with the thought of Thy vengeance, and I will use it as a check to avoid sin, and as a means to live and breathe only for Thee. Yes, I will live continually as if my bodily eyes habitually beheld Thee in the terrors of Thy justice. I will retire apart, as did Jeremias, to fill my mind with the remembrance of Thy vengeance, and to learn to appease Thy wrath by my penance. Penetrate my heart with this fear, O my God ! may it not be in me the effect of scrupulosity, and consequently inactive ; may it be filial and active ; practical and effective ; fervent and animated by confidence.

Oh awful moment, which shall decide my eternity ; when nothing shall speak in my favor, but my works ; when I shall find in my Father and Spouse, only an inflexible Judge ; when I shall be enlightened and, as it were, invested with Thy light, Lord ! What shall I then answer to Thy accusations ? Alas ! like that man, whom the Gospel represents to us at the tribunal of the Great Master, who could answer the reproaches made him only by a profound silence, I will have nothing to reply, O my God ! Or rather, like the wicked servant, who wishing to answer, spoke only for his own condemnation, I will find, even in my answers, the matter of most humiliating confusion. In this overwhelming state to whom can I have recourse ? Without advocate, without defence, without protector, my only resource would be the power of annihilation. But Thou, great God, will preserve me to serve as a victim of Thy anger. No more temples wherein to pray ; no more sacraments to purify, or priests to reconcile me. I shall find no angel to conduct me, no intercessor to defend me, no Mother of mercy to obtain my pardon. All the saints will praise Thee for exercising Thy justice. My holy founders will rise up against and reproach me. Many seculars will be compared with me, who in the world have been more virtuous ; pure souls in the midst of corruption,

profoundly recollected amidst embarrassments and cares ; depriving themselves of what was even necessary, to give it to the poor ; above all human respect ; resigned in the most terrible trials ; regular in their devotions ; detached from everything in the midst of riches ; so simple and docile without vows ; so penitent without sin ; so many christians, in a word, who have been poorer in spirit, more chaste, more charitable, more religious than I, will be compared with me and rise up in judgment against me. I shall be compared with a multitude of saints of my own state, and particularly of my own order. Their meekness, humility, patience and regularity will be shown in contrast with mine. I had the same vows, constitutions, rules, trials, helps, exercises of piety, and the same means of becoming perfect which they had. What an overwhelming confusion for me ! O my soul ! have you ever well understood these truths ? Meditate on them unceasingly, to prevent a judgment so enlightened, so equitable, so dreadful !

What Lord ! to approach Thee only to be eternally repulsed ! to appear before Thee only to hear the sentence of my condemnation ! Ah, Lord ! rather save a soul who acknowledges herself guilty ; a soul, whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy blood, and to whom Thou hast already applied its fruits in a very especial manner. Make me worthy to hear these consoling words which Thou wilt address to the truly religious souls on the day of judgment : “ Come ye blessed of My Father, and possess the kingdom which I have prepared for you.” Ah ! what will be the joy of the fervent soul ! What will be her gratitude ! If she could then feel any regret, it would be, not to have conformed herself still more to her divine Model ; not to have loved Thee enough, dear Lord, not to have immolated herself more generously. How great art Thou, O Lord, in Thy rewards ; how magnificent in Thy saints. What is more capable of animating me to the most austere practices of religious life than the sight of Thy mercy, so liberal to Thy friends. Can I then find any penance too hard, or virtue too difficult, to obtain for myself the advantage of having Thee for Father during life, for Saviour on the day of Thy vengeance, and as eternal Remunerator after that judgment.

THIRD DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION.—ON HELL.

First Point.

“AND the smoke of their torments shall ascend up forever and ever; neither have they any rest day or night.”—Apoc., xiv. 11.

Nothing in nature, can give the least idea of the torments of hell. It is only through mercy that God afflicts the sinner on earth; in hell, it is justice alone, which exercises upon him the whole extent of its power. Here, the short duration of life gives a hope of the approaching end of pain; there, a never ending eternity fills the unhappy victim of the wrath of God with a continually renewed despair. O eternity! who can sound thy abyss! O hell! who can number thy evils! A devouring fire, an avenging God, a gnawing worm, and this forever!

In the deepest part of the earth, it is, as in a vast pool of sulphur and bitumen, kindled by the wrath of the Almighty! St. John says, they are buried alive, who die in the disgrace of God. In an instant, the fire insinuates itself through all their pores, and their bodies are penetrated with it, as iron in the furnace. It is an immaterial fire, more penetrating, because it is the instrument of the anger of a God, Who in kindling it, proposed to manifest His justice with as much splendor as He manifested His mercy in becoming man; of drawing from crime a vengeance proportioned, in some manner, to His greatness; and of repairing the profanation of His blood, which the sinner has trodden under foot. It is a fire, which He as God, has kindled to punish His enemies in which as is seen the finger of His justice, the strength of His hand and the omnipotence of His arm. It is a fire, whose supernatural activity preserves the body whilst tormenting it; which burns without consuming. For this it is compared in the Gospel to salt, because it preserves in place of destroying, repairs instead of dissolving, and keeps the victim, who is its food, in a constant state of suffering. It is a

fire, which will be applied to the body of each reprobate with a spirit of discernment proportioned to the nature and greatness of his crimes; which, fed by the hand of an irritated God, will always burn without ever losing its ardor or its rigor, without ever being extinguished, without dividing, without giving light, whose avenging qualities will not only penetrate the body, but will act upon the soul, its powers, and faculties. It will penetrate the very substance of body and soul, in a region of horror and darkness, where everything will be seen that can cause horror to the sight, frightful spectres that fill with terror. These victims of divine vengeance will suffer all imaginable pain. Every part of their bodies will be tormented at the same time. God will add to the punishment of fire, that of despair, howlings, rage, gnashing of teeth, and each sense will have its particular torments.

If these unhappy victims could love God, hell would be less insupportable. But no: hell would become a paradise, if the delights of divine love could be tasted there. St. Lawrence appeared insensible in the midst of flames, because he loved much. But in the excess of her frightful pain, the lost soul will turn to God. Instead of those sweet words, which He usually answers to the afflicted; "Have patience, I see all, and will reward you," she will hear only these: "Why do you call on Me, I am not your God. Call me your enemy, for I am, and ever will be so." Ah! exclaims St. Augustine, give me a heart that has once loved God, it will understand and feel what I say, give me even a soul possessed by a creature and it will comprehend! God will then make Himself be known and felt as He is. The soul will wish to love Him, and she cannot; she will wish to hate Him, and her heart will be torn; in blaspheming Him, she will be inconsolable that she cannot love Him. St. Chrysostom says that this is the peculiar torment of hell; always to wish to love God, and never to love Him; always to wish to possess Him, and never to possess Him; always to wish to be delivered from His vengeance, and never to be freed; always to wish that which never will be, and never to wish what will be for all eternity. What despair! To

have lost God, to be separated from Him is but little felt by the mind weighed down by this mortal body, and by the carnal heart attached to the earth. But after death, the soul of the reprobate, delivered from her corporal prison, will return by a natural and violent inclination, towards her principle, her centre, and her end. Her own weight will carry her with rapidity towards her Author. But stopped by her sins, God will draw her with one hand, to make her suffer more cruelly, and with the other, will repulse her with indignation. On one side, this soul will rush forward towards God, and exclaim in her transports; "Where is my God? What has become of my God?" On the other hand, God will reply "there is no God for you; the God of the universe is no longer your God." Then turning all her rage against herself, she will again exclaim: "but if there is no God for me, why these transports for Him, which rend me? Why do I not return to my first nothingness?" In vain will she seek to break the bonds which keep her in the flames, to seek either her God or death. She cannot escape from that abode of tears, where she will find only her avenger, and continually new torments. From this will arise execrations and fury against a God, Whom she will detest as her enemy. Eternally she will curse Him, Whom she can neither destroy nor love. The more she will feel herself drawn by the charms of that divine Beauty, the more she will multiply her maledictions; not being able to content her love, she will endeavor to satisfy her hatred. What greater horror than hell for a soul that had once belonged to God.

If at least she could forget. But no: on the contrary, it is by this bitter remembrance of her dignity, that the hatred of the reprobate soul is augmented, because the image of God, ineffaceably engraven in her will, recall at every moment the merit and greatness of the object she has lost. She cannot forget during the course of ages, that the object of her hate ought naturally to be the object of her love. She will reproach herself eternally for having lost her God by her own fault, notwithstanding His graces, His patience, His mercy, and His blood shed for her; this is properly the punishment of the religious soul

in hell. The hell of hells for her, is the thought, that she could have avoided hell and did not do so. The peculiar torment of a religious in hell will be the remembrance of the merit and grandeur of the object which she has lost. The idea of what her Saviour has done for her salvation will represent to her a rain of blood, that blood of Jesus Christ which flowed for her to the last drop transformed into a torrent of flames and wrath. I could have refrained from sin, and I did not, will she say. But having sinned, there was still a resource for me; grace was offered me: everything concurred to my salvation. What abundant helps! I was incessantly urged. God Himself, my conscience, my superiors, my state, everything invited me; so many others profited by the same means. Chosen souls of my God, you have been what I was; religious as I was, why am I not what you are? I could have been but am not, will never be, because I have not willed it. Ah! Ye glorious predestined! From the bottom of this gulf of fire, I see you seated upon thrones of glory. I even see amongst you the place and the crown that were prepared for me. I see you in the centre of happiness and I shall never have any other portion than hell and despair! I have lost heaven! I am in hell! It is my own fault. But what completes my misery is, that it shall be eternal! Sin has left so deep a stain upon my soul, that it cannot be effaced by the pains of eternity. Oh eternity! whose moments will be ages, and whose ages will never finish! Eternal Beauty! never more shall I behold you! Divine Light, you have disappeared from me forever! You leave me buried in the shades of eternal night. O God! I am forever to be the object of Thy hatred! To bear eternally the weight of Thy wrath! After having been destined to possess Thee eternally, I am to be forever banished from Thy presence, and condemned never to love Thee. Never to love Thee, O tender father, O liberal spouse, never to love Thee, and never, never to be loved by Thee!

Then, turning her rage against herself, because she knows that she is the authoress of her own misfortunes, she will seek anew to destroy herself; she will endeavor to get out of the fire that surrounds her, but in vain.

Insurmountable obstacles stop her; she will feel an invisible but omnipotent hand that plunges her again and again in those devouring flames, and gives a new weight to the chains which hold her captive. At length, finding no resource but in her despair, she joins in the roarings and imprecations of the demons, her associates, and all together, animated with hatred against God, turn upon each other, upon themselves, and in the howlings of despair, curse God, curse themselves, and curse one another.

Second Point.

Here, O my God! my mind wanders, my thoughts are confounded; like David I am so troubled that I can no longer speak. How is it that these terrible truths have hitherto made so little impression on me. Oh avenging and eternal fires! Hell! Behold where I would already be, hadst Thou rendered me exact justice; if Thou hadst not treated me according to Thy great mercy. Behold, where, perhaps, I will fall at this moment should I die suddenly, where I will one day be cast if I persevere in my faults; for what will cause me to be buried, with so many others in the abyss?—one mortal sin, and death in sin. Is mortal sin so difficult to commit, and are the surprises of death so extraordinary? What! my eternity depends on a moment, on a great number of little things, on a little more or a little less of time, a little more or less of delay, a little more or less of matter, or of consent to sin; on a little more or less of sorrow, of contrition, of liberty, of reason, and I have thought so little of it! I have occupied myself so seldom with it; I have marked all my steps by great faults. A thousand and a thousand times have I deserved hell. O my God, Thou couldst, and Thou shouldst have cast me into the abyss, and Thou didst not.

Thy goodness, O my God, has watched over me; Thy arm has restrained me on the borders of the precipice. Thy justice demanded vengeance; Thy mercy would not consent to it. This is not all. Not only wouldst Thou not destroy me, but notwithstanding my ingratitude, what hast Thou not done to save me? Thy patience still waits

for me ; Thy goodness seeks and watches over me ; Thy blood offers me the pardon of my sins ; Thy liberality diffuses upon me its lights. Even in this retreat, Thou makest known to me in a more particular manner the eternal torments by which Thou wouldst punish the ungrateful. Thy wounded love would avenge itself, only to teach me to avoid sin, and to force me to love Thee by the fear of Thy justice. Who art Thou, O my God ! and who am I ? What is my heart, that Thou shouldst so ardently desire to possess it ? Is it then possible, that this heart, which has received from Thee life and an infinity of blessings ; that this heart, taught by its own experience and by Thy special grace, can find true happiness except in Thee alone ; that this heart, which Thou hast purchased by so many opprobriums, so many sufferings, which Thou hast made in so special a manner a partaker of the fruits of Thy death, which Thou hast led, as it were, by the hand into the sanctuary ; that this heart should not love Thee ? Was it necessary, that so many motives for loving Thee should be given ? Was it necessary, that to these motives, the fear of hell should be added ? At the sight of these threats what am I to think of the desire Thou hast for me to love Thee ? By the immensity, the eternity of the punishments, which Thou preparest for my ingratitude, I conceive the immensity, the infinity of Thy desire, of Thy will for my salvation. Have I a heart if it is not moved by these reasons ? Oh how well calculated are the flames of hell, attentively meditated, to excite in a soul, the flames of divine love ! Ah Lord ! since, by an admirable effect of Thy goodness, I am not now burning in the flames of hell, let me burn, let me be consumed by the fire of Thy love. Let my gratitude be eternal at the sight of Thy mercy, which has hitherto preserved me from an unhappy eternity. Like the youths, who were thrown into the furnace, and preserved from a temporal fire, I will invite all creatures to bless Thee for having spared me eternal punishments. I will praise Thee like David, for having drawn me from hell, and from the lowest depths of hell through an excess of Thy goodness. I should have been sacrificed to Thy anger, I will sacrifice myself now to Thy love. My tongue would have cursed Thee, it

shall bless Thee eternally. My body would have burned, without ever being consumed ; it shall be slowly consumed in Thy service. All creatures would have contributed to my punishment ; I will immolate them to Thy greatness. I will forget them, sacrifice them, and they shall aid me to go to Thee. I would have blasphemed Thee with the companions of my misfortune ; I will sing Thy praises, bless Thy holy name, and publish Thy mercies with my sisters, and with all the souls devoted to Thy service. I will continually recall Who Thou art, what Thou dost merit, what Thou hast done for the most unworthy of Thy creatures. My punishment would have been eternal, my gratitude and love shall endure forever.

I will be all Thine, all Thine through gratitude and fidelity. To strengthen myself in this resolution, I will, like St. Teresa and my holy founder, who made it a practice, often transport myself in spirit to the abyss, there to seek my place. Following the counsel of St. Bernard I will often descend into hell during life, that I may not go there after death. I will often think of the eternal privation of Thy presence which is, without doubt, the most cruel of all the torments a soul can endure, who is specially called to the happiness of possessing Thee eternally. I will recall without ceasing, that if among men the same punishment is often the chastisement of one more or less criminal, it is not so before Thee. The pains of the reprobate, although eternal in duration, will have limits more or less extended, according as the sins will have been more or less numerous, the state more or less holy, the means of salvation and perfection more or less abundant. Consequently, the hell of the religious soul will not be that of the infidel, nor even of those of the world ; but a hell a thousand times more cruel, where not only the ardor of the fire, the persecution of all creatures, the punishments of body and mind, the eternity of pains, and the pains of eternity, the privation of all good, the weight of all evil will be common to her with the demons, her associates ; but, still more than they, will she be tortured with the bitter regret of having lost Thee, Who wert more particularly her God. More enlightened than they on the greatness of her loss ; more consumed with desires for beatitude, and

more furious against Thy avenging hand which has banished her; more divided than they between a natural and necessary love for Thee, and a free, voluntary hatred, she will be more acutely tormented in all the powers of her body, soul and substance. These traits of Thy justice, Lord, will increase my fear and my vigilance. Henceforth there will be no attachment, no pleasure, no satisfaction that I will not sacrifice to Thy grace, Thy law and my vows. Weariness, disgust, dryness, infirmities, persecutions, dependence, regularity, labors, penance, mortification, fears real or imaginary, trials in the constant practice of good, nothing will cost me. I will say to myself, what is this compared to hell where I should burn forever. Thus will I animate myself in the way of that perfection to which Thou hast called me, by the grace of predilection. Support my weakness, O divine Spouse; purify me in Thy mercy, that I may avoid the wrath of Thy justice, which punishes without limits, and be not oppressed by the weight of Thy sanctity!

THIRD DAY.

CONFERENCE.—ON THE VOW OF CHASTITY.

“THE unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord that she may be holy both in body and in spirit.”—I Cor. vii., 34.

There is no vice that causes so many souls to fall into hell as impurity. This crime has so great, so singular an incompatibility with God, Who is purity by essence, that He has always punished it by the most signal vengeance. In the early ages of the world, this thrice holy God, after having sworn that His spirit should no longer dwell with men given up to impure passions, accomplished His word by drowning the universe under the waters of the deluge, by purifying even the earth itself from the stains it had contracted. This is but a feeble image of the wrath which will animate Him during all ages, against this monster,

which He detests. Nothing sullied can enter the kingdom of heaven. Hell will be the portion of those who render themselves like the devils, whom the Scripture calls unclean spirits: of those, who, although they do not fall into the grossest disorders, render themselves guilty of impure and voluntary thoughts, desires or emotions. There is no virtue, therefore, more essential, and which is more dangerously and easily wounded, than chastity. The least faults committed in this matter, when they are fully consented to, and when they are committed through a spirit of impurity, are mortal. But, if every voluntary sin against chastity is a mortal sin in all sorts of persons, in a religious soul it is not only a crime, but an adultery, because she has a Spouse, and this Spouse is a God, and a jealous God, and there exists between this God and the religious, an alliance sealed with a mutual promise, which is to last for all eternity. The faults which attack the purity of a religious, render her guilty of a mortal sin containing a double malice, which, on account of her vow, becomes a sacrilege. There are some cases in which a secular would commit only a venial sin as, for example yielding to certain levities, which are frequently committed in the world, even in presence of other persons. But in these a religious would sin mortally, on account of the scandal she would give, the wrong she would do both to religion and the sacred engagements she has contracted. How great, then, should be her care not to alter in anything her vow of chastity! What exactitude in practising a virtue which requires so much! A virtue which St. Francis of Sales says is fundamental in his order! "It is not necessary," said he, "to declare to you how much you are obliged to practice it, for, in a word, you should live, breathe, and aspire only to and for your heavenly Spouse, in all sanctity and purity of mind, words, demeanor, actions, and by an angelic and immaculate conversation. What a happiness for you to observe voluntarily, even in this life, this pure chastity which the angels and saints necessarily observe in heaven." He desired that in quality of spouses of Christ and dwellers on Calvary, the sisters should be divested of all human desires and affections, as their divine Spouse was of the robe He wore when He arrived there; that

being clothed one day in the white robe, they may "follow the lamb whithersoever He goeth." This desire of St. Francis of Sales is the will of Jesus Christ. The greatest privilege for those, to whom He has shown the mercy of separating them from the engagements of the world, is to have taken them, says St. Paul, from all that divides the heart, and to have left them no other care upon earth, but that of thinking of God, and of being employed in the things of God, to find in this kind of life true sanctity. Their happiness and glory is not only to belong to Him by purity, but also to be His alone by the integrity of their heart. It is, in effect, to live in the flesh, whilst refusing everything to the flesh. It is to change, as it were, their own natures, by leading angelic lives. It is to cherish their state, full of spiritual sweetness and chaste pleasures, worth infinitely more than those they have sacrificed. What a consolation for a religious, and what thanks should she not render to her God, for having chosen her from all eternity, to honor her with the glorious quality of His spouse; for having united her to Himself, by bonds equally honorable and indissoluble, and for having drawn her from the corruption of the world, to give her a safe asylum, a sanctuary, where He has placed His throne, where He resides, and where He takes His delight in the purity which is so faithfully observed by her. There, beloved by her spouse, Who feeds among the lilies, she should endeavor to correspond to the honor which He does her, by applying herself to tighten the sacred bonds which attach her to Him; to purify her heart more and more, in order to render it more capable of loving Him. Truly chaste, she should exchange love for love, extinguish a profane by a sacred fire. To love, she should unite fear, because chastity, that pure and precious virtue, is blighted by a single voluntary thought; because she carries this treasure in a fragile vessel, and if it is in more safety in religion than in the world, it is not, however, without danger. In separating from the world she did not separate from herself; and in herself she carries a domestic enemy, so much the more to be feared, as it is usually loved, nourished, and flattered. She should carefully avoid the snares laid for her and take all the

more precautions, as no fault is light, when there is question of impurity ; lightness being but little excuse in this matter.

But little generosity was necessary for her to pronounce the vow of chastity, but what vigilance fidelity to this engagement requires ! The tempter fails not to profit by the least access that is given to him. He seduces the heart when he is listened to, and what progress does he not effect in a short time, in the way of perdition. A complacency, a thought, a desire, a look, an effusion of the heart, a curiosity,—what terrible conflagrations have been caused by these sparks ! A passion that is not entirely suppressed cannot suffer limits which it always finds too narrow ; it soon bursts the feeble bonds which restrain it. What cannot a rising inclination do in a weak and negligent heart ? What bad fruits will not this root produce, if not promptly eradicated ! If this poison is preserved what infection will it not cause ? When this bad leaven enters the mass, it soon corrupts it. At first, this passion produces an infinity of reflections ; sometimes bitter, sometimes agreeable, and how often does it not bring sighs after a free state ? If these thoughts be listened to, there follows a certain weariness in the practice of piety ; a disgust for obedience ; relaxation in the things of God ; and in preparation for the divine mysteries ; in the frequentation of the Sacraments, and in reading holy books. Prayer, that heavenly manna, becomes insipid to her. The presence of the more exemplary is feared, their conversation wearies. There is not yet an open revolt against God ; this artful passion, not to appear such as it is in reality, covers itself with a borrowed veil. How much to be feared are the hidden sparks of this fire ! God Who has not yet abandoned this soul, seeks to withdraw her from her error, and gives her remorse of conscience and reproaches of grace. More sensible to her loss than she is herself. He consents to it with pain, but will not force her heart. He desires she should love Him freely, therefore it is necessary that she should offer a kind of violence to His Heart, to oblige Him, as it were, in spite of Himself, to abandon her to her evil passions. But, once separated from God, into what an abyss does she not plunge !

What are not the fatal consequences of this passion which was almost imperceptible in its commencement, but so rapid in its progress? No more principles of virtue, no more sentiments of piety, no more remorse of conscience, no more heavenly lights, but blindness of mind, and hardness of heart! If this impure soul does not lose faith, she has only a dead faith. Such is generally the frightful lot of a religious, who having been raised to the glorious quality of spouse of God, though unworthy of it, and having been, at the same time, ornamented with grace and with all the advantages that could elevate her baseness, and supply her deficiency, instead of being grateful to her divine Spouse, neglects her duties, and the obligations she is under to Him, dishonors Him and herself. Ah! how many, according to the language of the Apostle, have commenced by the spirit and ended by the flesh! "An Angel transformed into a demon," says St. John Climacus, "is not more horrible than the soul of such a religious."

To avoid so dreadful a misfortune, and to preserve purity in all its lustre, what should not a spouse of Christ do, who has acquired this august honor at the price of the blood of this man-God? Behold the advice which her holy foundress gives her; she should, in the first place, love chastity with her whole heart, as an infinitely amiable virtue, which by a solemn vow she has promised God to keep all her life, and she should abhor the opposite vice above everything that is most horrible in the world. She should be sincerely prepared in heart, to enter rather into a burning furnace, and suffer the most atrocious torments, than to permit the least blemish in that purity which is the ornament, the beauty, and the delight of chaste souls. Heaven is not farther from earth than should be all that can, ever so little, tarnish this virtue in her. She should be deeply penetrated with the sanctity of her state, and literally fulfil the obligations which it imposes on her of leading an angelic life. She should keep the powers of her soul in tranquillity and modesty, avoiding curiosity, and retrenching from the will a multiplicity of desires, thus keeping it always in simplicity. She should compose the motions, gestures, and deport-

ment of her body, says St. Chantal, avoiding two extremes which are levity, and a too affected manner. She should not allow herself any free or curious looks upon persons of the other sex. Her veil is her buckler; to raise it is to disarm herself, and to expose herself to her enemies without defence. She should watch over her imagination, her mind and her heart, not to suffer any impure thoughts or affections to enter. She should not allow in herself anything that does not breathe the odor of the greatest purity before men and angels. Above all, she should avoid those secular conversations, in which the world is spoken of, in which free or useless words are spoken, where gravity and propriety are often lost. In a word, she should be chaste in everything, chaste in her eyes by the modesty of her looks; in her ears, by her fidelity in turning them away from all improper discourses; in her lips, by her reserve in speaking; in her hands, by her purity of action; in her feet, by the modesty of her walk; in her deportment, by the composure of all her members, in which nothing should appear, free or unbecoming; in her mind, by the purity of her thoughts; in her heart, by the sanctity of her desires; finally, she should be chaste by pure and spotless manners. Chastity should not be in her a constitutional or philosophical virtue, which consists in abstaining from the vices opposed to this virtue, because one has no inclination to them, or because they are contrary to reason. A religious should practise purity from higher motives; to make to God a sacrifice of her flesh, as well as of her mind; to glorify Him in her body as well as in her soul; to prepare for Jesus Christ, an agreeable abode; in a word, to unite herself more intimately to God and to imitate Him more closely.

In order to practise this virtue of chastity with perfection, a religious must not only abstain from the pleasures directly opposed to this virtue, but also from those of all the other senses. Purity must elevate her above all sensible pleasures, above all affections. It must make her enter, as much as possible, the state in which the flesh of Jesus Christ was, after His resurrection, insen-

sible to all the pleasures that are derived from objects here below, the state in which the bodies of the saints will be, when elevated in glory; a state resembling that of the angels, those substances separated from matter, and incorruptible; finally, the state of purity and immortality, with which she herself will be clothed, after the end of ages.

To attain to this what means should she employ? Mortification, humility, prayer, obedience and flight from occasions. In vain will she hope to be chaste, if she does not reduce to servitude, by abstinence, fastings, watchings, labor, and all the austerities prescribed by the rule, a flesh always rebellious to the spirit. A hard, painful, and laborious life is the support of chastity; an easy, sensual, and idle life is its destruction. St. Francis of Sales says, that only the salt and myrrh of mortification can prevent this sinful flesh from corrupting. To mortification, humility must be joined. She must continually acknowledge, at the feet of her God, that this virtue is above her strength, and that He alone can give it to her. Consequently, she should incessantly ask it of Him, and subject her spirit to her superiors, to render herself worthy, that Jesus Christ Himself may subject her flesh to His spirit. Above all, she should avoid occasions, because it is only by flight that she can gain the victory. She should avoid all frequent visits, all marks of particular friendship, for it is impossible for them not to cool, if they do not divide her heart; nothing cools divine love so soon as particular friendships, and nothing is more dangerous in its consequences. She should distrust her own heart, lest it betray her; banish from it all sensible attachments, and never suffer it to contract a particular friendship, under any pretext whatever, even the most specious, as are the direction and the desire of aiding souls to advance in perfection; how easy it is to pass from a spiritual to a natural affection. From the same principle, she cannot fear too much that too human attachment, which, under pretext of piety and spiritual need, is so easily conceived and nourished for a confessor. She should avoid having with him those long and frequent conferences, in which, at least much time is lost and

occasion given to our neighbor for murmuring and disedification. To strengthen herself on this point, she should always remember what St. Teresa relates of herself. God made known to her, that an attachment to her director, which she thought was innocent, would have been an obstacle not only to her perfection, but also to her salvation, and He even showed her the place in hell, which she would have had on account of it, had it not been broken.

Notwithstanding all these precautions, which St. Francis of Sales and St. de Chantal require, God sometimes permits the religious soul to suffer the most grievous and humiliating temptations, either to exercise her virtue, to increase her merit, to excite her vigilance, or to remedy a secret pride in the recesses of her heart. This soul should then humble herself without being troubled or disquieted. She should be persuaded that our Lord will not permit her to be tempted above her strength, but that He will draw His own glory and her advantage from her temptations, purify her even from her involuntary impurities, fortify her in her weakness and the revolts she experiences in spite of herself, and which she vigorously combats. What is in the mind, the imagination, and the senses, how impure soever it may appear, does not sully the heart, as long as it displeases it; only the will can render the soul guilty. A propensity to evil, is not a sin; it may become an exercise of virtue, especially if the soul apply herself, to practice abandonment, fidelity, and constancy; abandonment to suffer; fidelity to support her state; constancy to persevere in her duty. The safest way of resisting in these circumstances is not to enter, through a spirit of scrupulosity, into a minute examination, which would increase the danger, and impress, in a more lively manner, the evil objects on the imagination. The shortest way to withdraw from the temptation is to disengage oneself promptly from the representations and sentiments, by suffering them to pass, as if we did not perceive them, and not to examine or repulse them positively, lest we give them more strength to tempt violently. The contempt we have for them diminishes by degrees their images and remembrance; the will, which has not consented, is strengthened in the inviolable resolution of

taking no pleasure in them, and in her horror of them; the soul is afterwards fortified by prayer, the mind by good thoughts, the heart by holy affections and the love of God; thus temptations are gradually weakened by the mercy of God, and calm succeeds the storm.

FOURTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.—ON THE HAPPINESS OF HEAVEN.

First Point.

“EYE hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him.”—1 Cor. ii., 9.

A powerful means for a religious, who wishes to break every tie that attaches her to sin, to the world and to herself, is to consider for what she is destined after this life, and how contemptible are the objects of her attachment, when compared with what she hopes for in the future. God, Who drew her soul from nothingness, could, without doubt, annihilate her, for it does not require more power to make nothing out of something, than to make something out of nothing. But God has revealed to her the immortality of her soul; He has assured her that, after a deep sleep, her ashes shall be awakened and the same body, which now serves as a dwelling for her soul, shall be restored to her, to be eternally associated in her fate.

She had a beginning, but she shall never have an end. All that strikes her senses, all that surrounds it, the world and what composes it shall be no more, or, at least, it will so change its form and figure as to be no longer recognized. It will fall again into its ancient chaos; but God and her soul shall remain the same forever; their years shall never fail. She should, therefore, look upon herself as a stranger in this world. There is for her no fixed and permanent abode upon earth, her home is in the bosom of God, and shall last eternally. To remember

this truth incessantly, the ancient patriarchs did not build houses. They lived in camps all their lives, and, says the Apostle, wandered from one province to another, that they might remember that this was not their home. They expected a permanent city, of which God Himself was to be the foundation. They desired it constantly and sighed for it from afar. Their language corresponded to their sentiments and actions. "Thus," said St. Peter to the primitive Christians, "should you think, live, and act." Do not, therefore, allow your heart to form any desire as regards time. It was with a view to imitate these patriarchs and first Christians, that the holy founders of our Order established the annual changes of cells, furniture, etc., that obedience ordains, so that, thinking of heaven, a religious should consider herself as an exile upon earth, and become insensible to terrestrial things. Does this contempt of all that passes away require her not to apply herself to anything else? No, even the spirit of her Institute is opposed to this; but, it is to teach her to use the things of earth as if she used them not, without eagerness or attachment. The thought of heaven does not prevent the necessary application which even her Rule prescribes, but it moderates that great activity, that intoxication of action, so to say, which would divert her attention from God and solid things. It reminds her that she must do everything through duty, and her duty only, because it is the Will of God. It animates her as much as passion would, but with a purer and more lasting flame. What, in fact, is more capable of animating her in labors and regulating her actions, than the sight of the reward. Ah! what a reward! Heaven! that is a kingdom which surpasses in beauty, riches and delights, all that the eye has seen, the ear heard, or the human heart can conceive or desire. Heaven! That is the masterpiece of the magnificence and omnipotence of her God, where she will see Him in His beauty and grandeur, where she will love Him without division or interruption, where she will be happy with His happiness, and clothed with his glory, where the divine attributes will be manifested to her in all their perfection. God Himself will fill her with delights. Who can express with what plenitude He will fill all her

faculties, communicate to her mind all the knowledge, and to her heart all the love of which they are capable. She will know that her happiness is eternal and, therefore, nothing will be wanting to the perfection of her joy. She will sing forever the mercies of the Lord, she will incessantly exclaim that His goodness is far above the heaven in which He has placed her.

Should not such a happiness inflame the heart of a true religious, even here, not with a mercenary love, excited by the view of her own interests, but with a truly filial love, which will make her sigh for heaven, for the love of God Himself? In the multitude of blessings which heaven promises her, she should cherish and desire no other delight than that of loving eternally her God, her Creator, her Saviour, her Redeemer, her Benefactor, the essential and only centre of her soul and her whole being. Should not the thought of this eternal union with her God render life a burden to her, and make her wish for death? Can a long life be desired by a true religious, to whom Jesus Christ has made a special promise to expand, in heaven the narrow limits of her heart and to inflame it with a more abundant love?

Our Lord has established in His house many mansions, but nearest to His sanctuary, shall be those souls, who have most closely followed Him on earth. Their kingdom is not of this world, their crown shall be more brilliant. Their bodies, says the Gospel, shall beam with a brighter light. a brighter glory; they shall be placed upon more luminous thrones and shall drink long draughts from that ocean of delights that shall water the city of God. Is there any virtue that does not become easy, are there any labors or penances that a religious cannot support at the sight of a remunerating God, Who promises her a happiness so immense in its greatness, so infinite in its extent, a happiness which He purchased for her at the price of His blood, and the acquisition of which He rendered easy by His grace, after having traced out the way by His words and example? What a lively ardor should she not feel in her soul, when told that this divine Heart will then draw her by charms so powerful, that it will be impossible for her to love any other; that her love for Him will be

pure and without any mixture of self-love, because it will be proportioned to her knowledge of God, which will be more perfect; whereas, here below, this knowledge being very limited, her love is very imperfect. It will be equable and immutable, because He who excites it will never hide Himself from her eyes, whereas, here her love is incessantly weakened, because her God incessantly escapes from her. It will subsist in all its strength, because God will furnish her without interruption new motives, which will excite in her heart new ardors, new transports, whereas, here her love is often extinguished, because this divine fire is enkindled in her soul only by the help of certain momentary and unconnected means. In fine, her love in heaven will be delicious, because the measure of her desire will be filled and flowing over; because the Holy Spirit, by His divine operation, will diffuse over all her affections the plenitude and sweetness of His unction, whereas, here the exercise of even her love becomes her torment and, perhaps, causes her such pain that, if God did not sustain her, she could not bear it without a miracle. What joy should not a truly religious heart feel, when she is told that these communications, which she has here with God, those sweet moments, tender affections and vivid lights, in which God makes Himself felt in prayer, are but feeble sparks of the fire, which will inflame and consume her in heaven for all eternity. "Ah! Lord," exclaimed St. Chantal, when meditating upon these truths, "when shall I quit this captivity? I languish and die with desire to die." O! serene day of eternity, which, will never be followed by night, because the Supreme Felicity will illuminate it, when will it dawn for me! O blessed moment, when I shall no longer have to fear any change in my love for my God, and when I shall be always loved by Him, my sweet Saviour, my God, my Spouse, and my All!!

Second Point.

Oh my soul! a God for your recompense! a moment of combat to attain it! an eternity of enjoyment! is it not enough to excite you to love, to reanimate your efforts, to

support you in the hardest trials! Often raise your eyes to the holy mountain, whence comes all your help. Thus, the holy founders of your Order, in the lively expectation of the blessings which were promised them, rose above sensible things. As their treasure was in heaven, their thoughts and desires were incessantly fixed upon it; this supported them in the difficult way of salvation. "A moment more," said they, "and the crown will be given me. Perhaps, this is the last occasion I shall have of proving my love for God, and this God of goodness will give Himself to me!" Ah! can I do too much to secure to myself such a blessing?

Oh my heart! meditate fully upon these words. What! to enjoy God for all eternity! Always to see God, to love Him, and to be loved by Him! Canst thou be insensible to such happiness! Canst thou make any account of the violence thou must do thyself to merit this happiness! Shouldst thou not have a sovereign contempt, an infinite aversion for all that can divide thy love! O eternity! immense duration! impenetrable abyss! boundless and bottomless sea! O eternity, how consoling thou art! There, my love for God shall have no limit; there, no more fear of losing grace, no more uncertainty of recovering it, but a full and perfect assurance of being loved; no more labor, no more tears, no more temptations! The sublime state in which Jesus Christ is in heaven is the image of the beatitude that awaits me. He has no more to suffer, He reposes; He has no good to desire; He enjoys the embraces of His father; He has no change to fear; He will reign there eternally. Thus for me, no more evils, miseries, trials, disgusts, weariness, heaviness, sickness,—no more nature and passions difficult to subdue. My body will be impassible, incorruptible, and immortal. God, Himself, will wipe away my tears, and their source will be dried up forever. I shall repose in the bosom of consolation; death and grief shall have no hold on me. As Jesus Christ, in the place of His repose, preserves the marks of His glorious wounds, and looks upon them with complacency, so, in the enjoyment of the most perfect felicity, I will recall these days of tribulation, in which I have been humbled, annihilated; and this memory, so

sweet and so consoling will form part of my reward. The wall which separates me from my God shall be broken down; I shall possess Him, and be possessed by Him forever. All my spiritual and corporal faculties will be satiated, not with the delights that here excites and content cupidity, but with a superior delight, which contains all delights in a supereminent degree; a delight, of which I could never support the immense weight, if God did not transform me into Himself; a delight, which no one can know, but the one who enjoys it, and which the one who enjoys it cannot know sufficiently to speak of it; unchanging felicity, which will have no vicissitude! Once united to my God, I can never more be separated from Him; He can never more escape me. I shall fear no weariness in an object, infinitely perfect, amiable and loving, inexhaustible in His perfections and infinite in His attributes. In Him, I shall always find something to know and learn; new beauties and new enjoyments will attach me to Him. I will be so satiated that I will have neither the eagerness of desire, nor disgust of satiety. Always transported with a new joy, I will feel eternally the force of a pleasure possessed, and the ardor of a love which desires. Always filled with God and what He merits, I can no longer offend Him; I will please Him in that abode of life, and I can please Him alone; I will love Him as long as He is God, and this will be forever. As I will no longer have any love but for Him, so will I have praises but for Him, praises weak and interrupted in this mortal life, but which, in heaven, will be eternal. Here, I can praise only the work of His hands; there, I shall praise Him, Himself, I will bless His sovereign majesty, His infinite sanctity, His eternal mercy. In His presence, I will pour out my acts of thanksgiving, with sentiments of respect and gratitude. Here, I can praise Him only in the effects of His attributes; there, I shall praise Him in His attributes themselves, which I shall know, discover, admire, and adore. Here, I, myself can praise Him, but it is my sorrow to live upon an earth, whose inhabitants praise Him not, or praise Him so little, or so feebly; but there, all voices will be united with mine to proclaim the magnificence of His reign, the

incomprehensibility of His glory. The elect of all ages and nations, united to hundreds of millions of angels, will surround His throne, and will discourse on the inexhaustible treasures of His power. Among them, I shall be. . . . All animated with the sole desire of praising Him, reciprocally aid one another by the purest, the sweetest, and most tender communications; loving themselves only from the impression made on them by the sight, knowledge, and possession of God; no impurity of the senses will glide into their union, all will be chaste, all spiritual; such will be the privilege of the blessed, such will be mine! O land of the Saints! O brilliant thrones! O eternal tabernacle! O blessed and incomprehensible eternity! How sweet it is to contemplate your ineffable felicity! Thou, O my God, will be my reward. Is not every thing expressed in these words? Thou, Who art the Supreme Good, will be my reward forever! What a thought! Happy with Thy happiness, to which there shall be no end; ravished, attracted, filled, and inundated with delight in the bosom of Thy glory for all Eternity! O recompense too great for a vile creature that has done nothing to acquire it! too great for an unworthy criminal that has not even sought it! too great for a penitent that will never do enough to deserve it! In fact, what can I do that is at all proportioned to the reward offered? What are all my efforts, all my struggles in the religious life, compared to such a crown! The world exacts much, gives little and often nothing, but Thou, O my God, Thou dost exact little and give much, or rather, all. Thou offerest me, Lord, the crown of immortality, demanding in return some slight sacrifices that even my own interest and repose require! Thou askest me to do myself a little violence for a short time, and have I not already lost too much of this short and precious time! Must I expect to lament in an unhappy eternity that time, which is now given me only to save me from such a fate, and assure to me the eternal home of Thy saints! O let me, henceforth, live only for Thee and for heaven. Let me live for Thee by dying to myself, for Thou art my inheritance, and Thee alone, do I desire. The centre of my felicity is in Thee; to Thee the weight of my love will unceasingly

bear me. To leave Thee for a single moment for the pleasures of sense would be to degrade myself. From Thee I come; to Thee I belong; Thou alone art worthy of me. My soul is immortal. Thou alone, O my God, art immortal and eternal, and shouldst excite my ambition and desires! Even in heaven, whom should I seek if Thou wert not there? Created especially for Thy love, its delights alone do I desire in the glory of the blessed. Without Thee, all the joys of heaven would be nothing to me; Thy beauty and Thy charms alone attract me, O my God. O death, amiable and desirable, when wilt Thou finish the course of my sad exile, in which I can only love my God imperfectly? When wilt Thou enable me to see Him unveiled, to love Him with a love no longer weighed down by the burden of this body, interrupted by the distractions of this life, that is, no longer variable and exposed to the danger of temptations! O Heaven! O my country! sweet abode of innocence, peace and love, when wilt Thou receive me? Alas! how long is my exile! Shall I yet dwell long among the children of cedar? Must I still languish in my captivity? O holy Jerusalem, for thee do I sigh! Wearily I sit upon the bank of the river of Babylon, my eyes bathed in tears at the remembrance of Sion. When shall I possess Thee, O my God! When shall I possess Thee? Ah! till that happy moment, my felicity on earth will be to have my conversation in heaven. I will go there in spirit, heart, and desire, until, in reality, I go there.

FOURTH DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.—ON THE IMITATION OF JESUS CHRIST.

First Point.

“FOR whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son.”—Romans viii., 29.

Am I of those chosen souls, or am I not? I know not. But this I do know, that my conformity with Jesus Christ is the only certain sign of my predestination, because it

is either the cause or effect of it. I have no need of any other light or reasoning than this. If I am not like Jesus Christ, or if I do not become like Him, I will be lost forever; all the other marks of my predestination are very equivocal, or rather, they all refer to this. Happy, then, am I, if I suffer for justice's sake; if I walk in the narrow way, because in this I resemble Jesus Christ, and God treats me as He did His own Son; God sparing me, I will treat myself as I know Jesus Christ has been treated. As the branch separated from the vine withers as soon as it is deprived of the fertilizing sap, is fit only to be burned, so every Christian, separated from Jesus Christ, is deserving only of hell. If an ordinary Christian is obliged to form himself upon this model, with much greater reason, a religious soul should regulate her conduct by His, and increase the divine union she has contracted with Him. The love of her Saviour for her made Him become like her; her love for Him should make her like Him, by the imitation of His virtues. She entered the religious state only to lead a life more conformable to that which He led upon earth. She should, therefore, imitate all His perfections, and especially His humility, poverty, patience, and obedience; virtues, to the practice of which she has more particularly devoted herself, and which are so much the more necessary for her, as they are more difficult to corrupted nature. The first lesson He gives her by his example, before giving it in words, is that of humility: a God incarnate, a God in the form of a slave, the Word made flesh, infinite and eternal humiliation! At the sight of so profound an annihilation, what should be hers? She should remember that she came from nothing, that she is only dust and ashes, that by her sins, she has debased herself beneath the demons, and that she can repair her faults, and withdraw herself from the corruption of her heart only by humility, which will be for her the key to the most precious treasures of grace, and the root of all virtues. At the sight of her God, absolute Master of heaven and earth, Who chose for His portion not riches but poverty, which virtue He consecrated, and somewhat divinised, by choosing it for His inseparable companion in all the

circumstances of His life, will she not discover a hidden treasure in a poor state, destitute of the ease and conveniences of life? Will she not cherish the evangelical poverty she professes, and which consists less in that of the body than in that of the soul, which annihilates every desire and causes her to use every thing, as if she used it not? At the sight of Jesus Christ, suffering in every part of His body, in all the faculties of His soul, should she not love the cross and be glad to share it with Him? At the sight of Jesus Christ, submissive and obedient to His Father unto the death of the Cross, should she not perfectly and constantly submit her will to that of God? Thus should she imitate Jesus in all the other virtues. But it is not enough for a religious to imitate her divine Model in those virtues, that every christian should retrace in himself. There is in this Man-God something still nobler, still more divine, to which she should conform herself. She should enter His soul, and endeavor to retrace its features in herself, and in this, properly consists the interior and religious life. In the soul of Jesus Christ, she must distinguish three kinds of operations, those of the mind, and the heart, and the faculty of moving the corporal powers and making them act exteriorly. Now what was the mind of Jesus Christ? Of what did He think? What judgment did He form of all things? His thoughts were all of God; the exterior touched Him only in as much as it referred to God. In all creatures, and in Himself as in a mirror, He recognized the power, wisdom, and greatness of God. If He formed designs, or executed projects, it was solely for the glory of God. Thence His faculty of conversing whole nights with His Father without distraction or weariness, of keeping united to Him in all the occupations of His mission; to turn thus easily from actions to prayer, we must willingly pass from prayer to action. To imitate Jesus in this is the first step a religious, who wishes to advance in the interior life, should take. Therefore, she should avoid and dread those idle thoughts, which are the cause of the tumult that agitates her mind, at the time when she should be most recollected. Is it loving God with all our mind to permit that same mind to be occupied with what has

no relation to Him? Do we lose less time in thinking than in speaking uselessly? and should we not fear the account we shall have to render of this?

Exterior solitude avails little, without the interior. In long moments of reverie, if we do not think of sin, we think of vanities: the passions are strenghtened by the representations of absent objects, as much as by the enjoyment of present objects that flatter them. The spirit of prayer is soon lost by one who does not make to herself a law never voluntarily to separate herself from God by thought. And, do not say the soul of Jesus Christ, united as it was to the Divinity, could not do otherwise than think of God. It is true; but, God as He was, He did not fail to employ the exterior means which rendered Him ever present to God, and God to Him. That is, He saw the world only through necessity. Silence, recollection and prayer were His element, and in this, especially, a religious should imitate Him. Grace will aid her efforts, and, by degrees, there may be formed in her so intimate a view of God, that it will, in some sort, effect what was brought about in the soul of our Saviour, by union with the Divinity. This was the experience of St. Francis of Sales and St. Chantal, to whom the presence of God was natural.

The thoughts of Jesus Christ regulated His judgments, and what were His judgments? "I judge," said He, "according to what I hear." And what did He hear? What did He consult? The judgments of His Father on every thing, on every person, every event. His judgments, therefore, were always equitable, invariable, and exempt from error. Thus should a religious judge. Whenever it is necessary to deliberate or to decide, she should consult and listen to God, in order to learn what He judges and approves. Thus, she will see what is important for salvation, for eternity, and how different the judgments of the world are from those of Jesus Christ. The world judges according to its imagination and senses, the suggestions of the passions; accordingly, it calls good what our Saviour calls evil, it despises what He esteems, and esteems what He despises. She will see this world such as it really is, an agreeable dream that vanishes on

awaking, a charm that enthrals reason. In fine, she will learn to judge of things as she will at death, at the tribunal of Jesus Christ, and during all eternity. After having thus regulated her mind by that of Jesus Christ, she will also regulate her heart by His. Now, what was this Sacred Heart of our Saviour? What did it love? What did it desire? What did it breathe? All the movements of the Heart of Jesus tended to glorify His Father, to accomplish His will, to see Him known, loved, and adored by all creatures. He had no fears, joys, hopes, or sadness, no pain, consolation, motion or repose, that was not referred to this, which He called His food and His drink. What a joy for that divine Heart, whenever He could manifest to His Father the transports of His tenderness! Then, He listened not to nature or its repugnance. To quit heaven, to live in poverty, to die upon a cross! . . . "What matter," said He, "My Father will be glorified; I will redeem, reconcile, and save men, whom My father so much loves." This was enough. Every thing else in life was insipid and insupportable to Him.

St. Francis of Sales says that a Religious of the Visitation, from the happy moment, when it was declared to her that her life is hidden with Jesus Christ in God, contracted an indispensable obligation of suffering nothing to exist in her, that is not conformable to the Heart of Jesus. The solid devotion to the Sacred Heart, recommended to her, consists in seeking her repose and consolation in God, in loving Him, in acting and suffering for His glory, in having no care or disquietude but for His service. To divide her heart, to permit it to love, to be afflicted, to be transported or dejected about a multitude of strange objects, is for her a sacrilege. All her beauty and glory is to have a heart conformed to the heart of her divine Spouse, and her heart, thus regulated, will influence all her actions.

What was it that animated the Heart of Jesus, set it in motion, and determined it in all its various operations? Always a principle of grace. The spirit of God was the soul of His soul. It was not so much He who spoke, acted, and prayed, as it was the spirit of His Father that

spoke, acted, and prayed in Him. "I speak not of Myself," said He. "but the Father who abideth in Me, He doth the works." (John xiv., 10). It is not enough for a religious to act in a state of grace. To be interior, she should act through a spirit of grace. She should not go before, but always wait for, and follow the impressions of grace. She should repress and mortify her natural activity, until God, Himself, so to say, actually applies her to what He wishes her to do or say in all things and at all times. Even in the duties that are to her taste, she should love the will of God, Who ordains them, being ever ready to interrupt or quit them, if God should call her to other duties for which she has a repugnance. In a word, she should serve only as an instrument in the hands of God, and remain indifferent to whatever He wills. This fidelity to grace will render her least actions almost divine, because there is so little of self-love. A word, a sigh, an elevation of the mind or heart, will often be more meritorious than great or difficult things, inspired by a fervor mingled with self-love.

Second Point.

With what bright light hast Thou not surrounded me, O my God! What great truths hast Thou not made resound in my ears! What duties conformable to the spirit of my state, and especially of my institute, hast Thou not traced out for me! Since the happy day, when I took Thee for my portion, when I died to the world and to myself, I should, according to the expression of my holy founder, live only Thy divine life, and conform myself in all things, to Thy example and sentiments. Animated by Thy spirit I will then imitate especially Thy humility, poverty, meekness, and obedience. I will, if possible, be as humble, as poor, as patient, and submissive as Thou wast; thus united to Thee, I will not fear to be lost. In vain will they tell me that this perfect resemblance is not of precept; I will answer, is there one or precept? What is there that separates it exactly from what is only of counsel? From not aiming at the counsels, we often fall short of what is of precept, and in violating the precepts, do I not run the risk of being lost? With

what confidence shall I, one day, present myself at the dread tribunal, where the most just shall have so much cause to fear ! What can, then, better reassure me than a resemblance to my Jesus? If I present myself to Him as another Jesus, can He vent His anger upon me? But if, on the contrary, I present to His eyes, on that day of vengeance, a formal opposition to His mind, sentiments, words, inclinations, and aversions, what will become of me? If I oppose only pride to His annihilations, dissipation to His continual union with His Father, impatience in pains to His patience in the greatest torments, sensuality to His fasts, ease and convenience to His mortifications, thoughts of pride, ambition and vanity to His head crowned with thorns ; an indiscreet levity in my manners, a disorderly will in my actions to His hands and feet fastened to the cross, a continual seeking of my own satisfactions and self-love to His body torn with lashes ; in short, a life destitute of good works to His precious life, immolated to obedience and the salvation of men, what a frightful comparison will be there ! Ah ! I perceive more clearly than ever, that I have an equal need of a model, by which to form myself, and of a guide in whose steps I may walk to arrive at the happy term of the perfection of my state. What other model should I propose to myself? What guide should I follow but Thee? Through Thee, I shall go to the Father. Thou shalt be my model by thy example, and my guide by Thy grace. Thou art the light of the world, and I shall collect its rays. I will animate myself by Thy spirit, and will study it in my actions. It will always tell me what I ought to do, because it will always represent to me what Thou didst, or, at least, make me conjecture, on such and such an occasion, what Thou wouldst have said, or done, or thought. I will constantly say to myself : “ He, Whom I see so humble, so poor, obedient, charitable and resigned, is my Redeemer, my Head, my King, my Master, my Model, and my Judge. Therefore, through justice, gratitude, duty, interest, fear, and love, I should imitate Him.” O my Jesus, I will study Thy heart and its most intimate sentiments, that ardent zeal that consumed it for the glory of the Father, that immense charity with which it burns for us, that jealousy

which it has for my love, a jealousy that so especially honors me! I will unceasingly exclaim: "O Sacred Heart! I have loved Thee too little; I have loved Thee too late, perhaps I have not yet begun to love Thee!" Or rather, I will address myself to Thee, O divine Jesus; place me in that adorable sanctuary, O my Jesus! Let me rest in that beloved Heart, and let all my passions and inclinations be there subdued! Let my imperfect desires, my languor, indifference, disgusts, cares, and solitudes, all be consumed in that furnace of love! Take from me this heart of stone, and give me a loving one, and let me be so united to Thee, that all may be for Thy love and through Thy grace!

Alas, Lord! had I always remained united to Thy spirit, and acted only through its impulse, what progress would I not have made in virtue! But too much attention and fidelity were necessary. I was content with offering Thee my actions, without reflecting that the disposition of my heart often belied the expression of my lips. I wished to please Thee, but it was according to my own choice, my own taste; or at least, I did not renounce every other pleasure; other motives were necessary to support and sustain me. Was this to love Thee, my God? I blush at my own heart, and I wish to reform it. Ah! henceforth, pure love shall support my efforts to do all for Thy good pleasure, and for this alone; I will embrace this noble and generous manner of acting of which Thou hast given me the example, and I will disavow all that opposes it. Alarmed nature will groan at seeing torn from her all that can serve as a support out of Thee. I will often test myself, to see if Thou alone suffice for me, and if, in my various actions, I seek but Thee. I will repress my sallies, my natural impetuosity, wherever I find them, and Thou alone shalt move them. The solidity of this nourishment may at first cause pain, because it is that hidden manna, which Thou hast promised to generous souls; but hidden as it is, it is, in its simplicity, a manna which will take away all other taste. In a word, the imitation of Thy virtues, O divine Model, and my conformity with Thee will be such that, if the means of obtaining Thy glory in heaven consist equally in contempt

and honor, in poverty and riches, in enjoyment and the cross, through respect for Thee, and laying aside every other consideration, I will choose rather to be with Thee poor, despised, mocked, treated as a criminal, crucified, than to be in a state of glory, abundance and pleasure, opposed to Thee. The pure desire of being more like Thee shall be my only motive. The force of Thy example alone will lead me to the practise of every virtue, to the faithful observance of my vows. I will make poverty my glory and merit, not because riches would have embarrassed, corrupted, or divided my heart in the world, but because Thou wast poor. I will obey with pleasure, not because I am diffident of self, and that obedience gives true repose, but because Thou wast submissive and obedient. I will live in the most perfect chastity, not because it is easier to abstain from pleasure than to use it in moderation, but because Thou hast been chaste. In a word, I will accomplish faithfully all my duties, only that I may advance in perfection, thus to become the living image, the perfect expression of Thy life.

FOURTH DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION—IMITATION OF OUR HOLY FOUNDERS,
AND THE SAINTS OF OUR ORDER.

First Point.

“WE are the children of Saints.”—(Tobias ii., 18.)

It was thus Tobias animated himself to merit heaven. He often considered the glory of the patriarchs, his fathers, now in heaven, and this consideration led him to retrace their conduct in his own. In the same spirit, St. Augustine incessantly said to himself: “Why cannot I do what such and such have done?” Thus, should a Religious of the Visitation say to herself: God has called me to sanctity, not only because He has placed me in a holy state, but in a state that has saints for its founders

and which has formed numberless saints, whose rare and eminent virtues, if not solemnized by the Church, have been recognized in my institute. Woe, then, to me if I do not profit by so many motives and means of sanctification. Is not Jesus Christ my model as well as theirs? Has He done less to merit my attachment? Were they not of the same nature as I? and had they not as many obstacles to overcome? Have I not the same helps and rewards to expect? Have I not even an additional grace in their example? An excellent privilege possessed by a Religious of the Visitation is that everything in her state is holy: the rule she follows, the instructions she receives, the employment she fulfils, the habit she wears, the food she takes and which, according to the opinion of the holy fathers, is the fruit of the charity of the faithful, and the price offered for the salvation of souls. But what should most powerfully animate her to the sanctity which, in the intention of God, is her portion, is, that the very place in which she dwells, the ground upon which she treads, is the land of the saints. Shall, then, every thing except her heart be holy? God has given her, in her holy founders and in the sisters who have preceded her, models of perfection according to whom, after Jesus Christ, He wishes her to form herself. He has traced out in their persons the way she must take to reach heaven. In following them, she walks safely and cannot go astray. The imitation of their conduct is the pledge of her salvation. It is, then, her interest, and her glory to conform herself to them, and, in some manner, to clothe herself with their virtues. If she cannot do all that they have done for God, for each soul has its peculiar way, she should at least imitate their patience, humility, recollection, and union with Jesus Christ, for these virtues are necessary for all. In the lives of her holy founders and the saints of her order, she must observe that happiness consists in sufferings; glory and greatness, in humiliations; and true riches, in poverty suffered for the love of God. She must see that, to love ourselves as we ought, we must hate ourselves, and to save ourselves, we must lose ourselves. She will also learn, that the glory of the creature consists in glorifying her Creator, and that, as she never glorifies

Him more effectively than by the sacrifice of all that she possesses, she is never happier and more glorious, than when she makes these sacrifices. Such were the principles that animated all these holy models in their conduct, and such motives should direct her in all her actions. She should faithfully imitate their spirit, their sentiments, the purity of their intention, their interior lives, their scrupulous observance of the rules, their contempt of the world, their recollection and retirement, their watchfulness over their senses, their detachment from creatures, and from their own will, their abnegation, their abandonment to God, their absolute poverty, their charity for their neighbor, and their ardent love for Jesus Christ and His blessed Mother. Such is the manner in which she must conform her life to theirs. Without this imitation, all her exterior veneration for them is vain and useless. The tribute she owes them is, not to publish their praises, but to make their virtues her own. In vain will she preserve their relics with care, if she endeavors not to preserve and transmit their spirit. In vain will she have them represented in pictures, and distribute everywhere copies of them, if she be not their living image. In vain will she erect altars to them, and lead others to do the same, if she dishonors them by her scandals. The veneration that is due them will subsist without her, as well as their power and the good odor of their virtues, but the lustre which they have shed upon their Order, and which their Order sheds on them, depends, as it were, upon her. This portion of their glory is in her hands; she must preserve and increase it, and avoid, even at the peril of her life, ever tarnishing it in the slightest degree. It has as yet suffered no stain; she should at least contribute her share to preserve its lustre, and act as though the interests of the whole institute were confided to her; as if the honor or shame of the entire body depended upon her. Such is the engagement, she has contracted by her profession; such is the sacred duty prescribed by filial tenderness for the holy founders and first mothers of her Order. The only proof of love she can give them is to imitate them. What they expect from her is, that she be conformed to them in every respect, as the Apostle St. Paul told his new-born children

in Jesus Christ. This resemblance ought not to be purely exterior. It is not enough for her to wear the same habit, to have contracted the same obligations, to be subject to the same duties, to have embraced the same kind of life, to be employed in the same exercises of piety and religion. Tepidity may have all this in common with fervor. But it is in her heart that she must resemble them; she must ornament her soul with the same virtues, which render theirs worthy of the divine Spouse. Without this perfect conformity, she has no real resemblance to them, no real love for them, and no protection to expect from them. Their hearts are, without doubt, sanctuaries accessible to all. The miracles wrought by their intercession are innumerable and universal; they are incessantly multiplied in favor of all those who invoke their name or their assistance. But although their hearts are favorable to all who petition them, they watch more carefully over their Order, a standing monument of their love and glory. They watch with more predilection over each of their daughters, the precious members of their institute. Now, this title which binds the holy founders to the religious of their Order, in like manner binds the sisters to them. They must be able to address themselves to them as their daughters, without fearing to be disowned; or rather, the marked traits of a perfect resemblance should speak for them and announce them. Otherwise, they would claim in vain the rights of their profession. They would uselessly solicit the help and powerful protection of these saints. They would seek, without hope, the blessing of their glorious Father and their holy Mother, and the prayers of their sisters who are justified before God. These saints would speak thus: "You ask us to plead your cause with God, to obtain for you His blessing and assistance; but is the name you take due to you? Is the title you allege truly yours? Are you really our daughter, since your sentiments and works are so little in conformity with our maxims and examples?" Terrible reproaches which announce but too well to a daughter of the institute, who has been unfaithful in following the example of St. Francis de Sales, St. de Chantal, and other saints of her Order, how dreadful will be the venge-

ance these saints will one day exercise against her, in quality of judges. In the Gospel, the divine Spouse knows not the foolish virgins, because the Lamb of God is followed by prudent virgins only. On the day of judgment, these inexorable judges will rise against her with indignation, will make a most rigorous examination into her life, and bitterly reproach her for her conduct. To her earnest entreaties to open to her the nuptial hall, they will answer only by this fearful judgment, this terrible and humiliating sentence: "I know you not!" What shame, what confusion for me, if these frightful words: "I know you not," are, one day, addressed to me!

Second Point.

Thus, however, I shall be disowned by God, by my holy founders, and the other saints of my Order, if I do not conform to their example. What a shame for me to dwell in an institute, in which the primitive fervor still exists, in which the Rule is enforced, the constitutions are observed; in which charity reigns, with all the traits that distinguish it from caprice, nature and humor; in which there is peace, union, deference, and respect among its members, and in which I show but irregularity, contempt of the Rule, opposition of mind and manners to the principles and examples of my models and sisters who were before me, and who live with me! I am changeable, suspicious, different, sharp, and contentious. In an institute, where obedience gives the movement to every thing without resistance, indocility, or complaint, where the hours are marked, employments fulfilled, occupations followed; where I see but innocence of manners, penance, mortification of the senses, retreat, modesty and prayer, and where, in a word, all justice is fulfilled, I am remarked for my indocility, and independence; I follow but my own inclinations, satisfy my senses, show wordly manners, hold wordly discourses; in fine, in a state where all should tend to my sanctification, I find my reprobation. Oh deplorable misfortune! Was it for this, that God called me into His holy sanctuary? that He used towards me a providence of predilection? that He chose me, and that I, myself, chose Him?

Were these views those of my holy founders for me? The love I owe them, the protection I expect from them, and the glory I am obliged to procure for them, are so many motives, equally tender and powerful, to solicit me to follow their examples. How can I deny their right over my heart? Ah! this heart, unjust, ungrateful, and insensible as it has hitherto been, is now moved and softened. Complete thy work, O Lord, pour into it the unction of Thy grace, and grant that perfect conformity to my models may be forever the fruit of this grace.

The life I live in God, I received in your bosom, O my holy founder, glorious St. Francis of Sales, most tender of fathers! Thou didst provide all the means necessary to preserve it. I belong to you, I dwell in your house; you have presided at my alliance with my heavenly Spouse, and I will endeavor to retain the fatherly tenderness thou hast ever had for me! O holy and august mother, what did you not suffer to beget me to Jesus Christ! How many combats, renunciations, sacrifices, solitudes, and contradictions, have I not cost you! What compensation, must you not expect from me in return! What honor have you not a right to exact from my heart! You limit this compensation, this honor, to the imitation of your virtues; can I fail, henceforth, to make this my only care? Can I be in opposition to you, and yet be persuaded that I love you? No, the motive, foundation and bond of conformity in true love is union of hearts; if, then, my heart neglects to form itself on yours, in vain would I make the most tender and affectionate protestations. By the light of the saints, you discern in God those, who truly belong to you, from those who have ceased to be yours. Ah! rise not up against me either in this life, or the next! I have cooled your goodness in my regard: I have weakened your favorable dispositions; but do not let them be entirely extinguished,—turn not wholly from me. Avenge yourself by beseeching the Lord to deal with me as God, that is, in the rigor of justice that strikes without destroying! However difficult, however austere, however perfect, may be your path, I will no longer waver; your foot-prints will guide my steps, and I confidently hope that you will support me by your powerful mediation. And you, O

glorious mother, and venerable and august sisters, who have preceded me. ah! must I not change very much to become like you! With what vigilance will I not watch over my senses, my will, my feelings, my heart, my discourses, —my whole conduct! How much I will have to retrench, to correct, to add, to perfect. Within me must be formed a new religious, and the difficulty of the change, far from weakening my resolution, will serve to animate my efforts; the labor will not intimidate me. Solicit for me the assistance of Him, Who inspires and calls me, for, with His aid, there is nothing I cannot do. Obtain for me that powerful grace that touches the heart, animates the will and enlightens the mind; causes good to be loved because it makes it known; gives the desire and power to practice what it commands. Henceforth, since I have the happiness of possessing the same quality, title, obligations, and assistance which you had, I will fulfil perfectly the same duties and engagements, by perfect docility to your lessons and maxims, and inviolable fidelity in following your example.

FOURTH DAY.

CONFERENCE.—ON THE VOW OF POVERTY.

“THERE is no man who hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for My sake and for the gospel, who shall not receive a hundred times as much, now, in this time. . . . and, in the world to come, life everlasting.”—Mark x., 29, 30.

Poverty is a virtue, which has for its end to moderate the cupidity natural to man, and it permits him to possess the things of this earth only in obliging him to detach his heart entirely from them, in order to attach it only to God and the things of heaven. This virtue is of precept and obliges every christian. It is so essential to Christianity that, without it, there is no salvation. There is, moreover, a poverty of counsel and perfection, which is styled Evangelical Poverty, and obliges us not only to detach ourselves in affection from the things of earth, but

also to divest ourselves of them in reality and without reserve. To this a Religious of the Visitation engages herself by vow ; she can possess nothing as her own ; nor receive, give, borrow, or lend anything, nor dispose of anything without the permission of her superiors. By her vow, she is deprived of the dominion of and attachment to all that she uses, so that she would sin mortally, if she disposed of any thing whatever, which, in matter of theft, would suffice for a mortal sin. Thus, this religious has no longer any action or pretention over the possessions of this world, and, if she were to demand again the inheritance she has quitted, the world could say to her : " Who are you ? Where do you come from ? You were buried on such a day, and there are authentic registers to testify that you are no longer of the world." Moreover, she has even divested herself of what belongs to the Community, both as to the ownership, which she cannot have, and the use, which must be subordinate to the will of religion, and not to hers. St. Francis of Sales says, that this renunciation consists in an entire and absolute divestment of all things, and especially of the heart. Therefore, a Religious of the Visitation should not allow anything created to occupy her affections. She should beware of loving, desiring, or attaching herself to anything whatever, for the covetousness of the heart, when we seek to destroy it, catches hold of everything it can. Above all, she should distrust a too eager desire to increase the temporal goods of the Community, for, then, cupidity would only change its object, and after having sacrificed the goods of this world with one hand, she would take them back with the other. This vice of possession in general has been condemned by the councils, anathematized by their canons, and expressly forbidden by the rules of all orders, especially by that of the Visitation, in which the spirit of poverty, and the most entire detachment is everywhere recommended, required in everything, and where it reigns most perfectly. Thence, the excellent practice which St. Francis of Sales has established of changing every year the cells, furniture, etc., so that no attachment may be had to anything. Thence, the law of this holy founder, which, while it requires that every house

of the institute shall have sufficient revenues, and that, both in sickness and in health what is necessary be given to the sisters,—ordains that everything be common among them, that each sister live in perfect detachment from what she uses, and that *they who wish for mine and thine* be put out of the door. Therefore, there cannot be any kind of ownership among them. Dowries, presents, everything must be in common, according to the terms of the Constitution. When everything is said, nothing is excepted. Such is the perfect detachment required by the Vow of Poverty.

“In this vow,” adds St. Francis of Sales, “a religious must distinguish what is of obligation from what is of perfection.” The essential consists in doing nothing without dependence, in giving or receiving nothing unknown to superiors, in not appropriating to oneself monies or chance presents, any more than the fixed revenues of the monastery; in a word, in renouncing all things, and forbidding one’s self the disposal of anything. But a soul who aspires to perfection will not be satisfied with this. She denies herself all superfluity, confines herself to what is necessary, and to the greatest simplicity. She has not only the exterior of poverty, but also its spirit and sentiments. She drives from her heart the least desire of having anything; she abandons herself to the care of those who have charge of her. She simply exposes her wants, but is not troubled, still less does she murmur, if they are not relieved. It is her happiness to feel little inconveniences, and she joyfully embraces the occasions; she complains only of suffering too little. She is wholly indifferent to all things, contented with everything, looking upon herself as a poor person who receives alms. She endeavors to economize her time as well as everything else, remembering that the Apostle says: “He who does not labor, does not deserve to eat,” and that sinful man has been condemned to eat his bread at the sweat of his brow. This perfect detachment places her soul in the happy disposition to receive the gifts of God in abundance. She becomes more watchful over herself, that, if the community has been enriched by her renunciation of terrestrial goods, she may not glory in it, and, as says St. Augustine, “become more proud in despising riches than she was in

possessing them ;” she makes no account of what she has sacrificed for God, and never prefers herself to those who may have brought less to the house. Her poverty is perfect, and she even renounces the honor that attends her engagement. Oh, what rapid progress in sanctity will not such a soul make ! The flesh pots of Egypt have been abandoned, and God will nourish her with the manna of His divine consolations.

According to these principles, a daughter of the Visitation should not be satisfied with not violating her vow. There is, it is true, a distance between transgression and perfection, but it is much safer for her to practice what is most conformable to the spirit of her founder, than to seek only the essential ; for nature is avaricious, and is never contented ; the more we give it, the more it wants. Happy are they, who early accustom themselves to retrench from nature all that is not absolutely necessary. They will, not only be more contented than those who allow more liberty to nature, but will also be better disposed for divine communications according to this saying of the Imitation : “ Quit all, and you shall find all.” They will find, above all, the peace and union of hearts, which is cemented by perfect renunciation ; for those little manifestations of superiority that easily arise in houses, from which ownership is not entirely banished, need not be feared by them. It is selfishness that alters common charity. They who have it in their power to give pleasure are sought after, whilst the others are despised. Thence proceed particular friendships, and a thousand other disorders, which are contrary to perfect union. What a happy privilege, therefore, for a daughter of the Visitation to be in an order, in which true renunciation is required, loved, and faithfully practised, and in which, she may enjoy, as did the primitive faithful, whom her holy founder had principally in view, peace, joy, and perfect repose ! She has reserved nothing in her sacrifices, and she has renounced, according to the terms of the Constitution, “ not only the property and interest or fruits, but also the use and disposition of all that may, on her account, be given or assigned to the community.” Further, she could not carry her renunciation. However, she should persevere in it, and

take back nothing of what she has sacrificed to the Lord, that, having kept God alone for her possession, He may one day be her inheritance. Such a poverty has great claims and powerful charms for a true religious, and yet, it is very far from the poverty of her divine Spouse, which, although free and voluntary, was so painful and humiliating.

The poverty of Jesus was painful: Master of heaven and earth, He was born in a stable, His blessed Mother having no other place into which to retire. A crib is His cradle, and what is not wanting to the last and least of men is refused Him. What has He not to suffer in His poverty? He has nothing, even absolute necessities are wanting to Him. He is without light and warmth in the midst of winter. Two animals only warm Him with their breath, and furnish Him with a little hay and straw on which to repose. This poverty follows Him into Egypt, to Nazareth, throughout the whole course of His public life, and even to Calvary. He is born of poor parents. He passes thirty years in the house of a poor mechanic who lives by his trade, and whom He assists in his labors. He travels on foot over towns and villages, without provisions, and without assistance, save from the charity of the people whom He instructs. His lot is more severe than that of the animals, as He, Himself, says: "The foxes have their dens, the birds of the air their nests, but the Son of man has not whereon to lay His head." At the end of His painful career, He dies in the most extreme indigence, having nothing to dispose of; He is even stripped of His clothes, which His executioners divide among themselves, and nothing remains to Him but a crown of thorns, a cross, nails, pains, and ignominies. At the sight of such a life, what does the true religious say? "My poverty," she exclaims, "when compared with that of Jesus, cannot be called poverty. I do not possess anything in private, but I do not want for anything. In what I call necessary, how much superfluity, is there not? How much self-seeking and delicacy? Is not suffering essential to true poverty? And can I believe that it is to poverty such as I practice, that the promises of God, my Saviour, and my Model,

have been made? Do not such great prerogatives, as that hundred-fold, those heavenly consolations, that place of distinction in glory, the right to judge men on the last day, necessarily suppose greater privations than mine? Can the secular, who is often in want of many things, be judged by me who am, perhaps, unwilling to want anything? To judge others, must we not show virtues to condemn them? a detachment which accuses their insatiable desires? a renunciation that rises up against their abundance? Now, what is my detachment, my renunciation? My poverty is a grace and favor of Providence, which has delivered me from temporal cares, from the embarrassment of riches, from the danger that follows them, from the trouble of collecting them, the sorrow of losing them, the injustice of acquisition, the pride of possession, and the crime of unlawful dispositions. Such are the advantages of my poverty, but does it not procure me even more than the ordinary advantages of riches, by suffering me to want nothing, and, at the same time, does it not deliver me from the disquietudes of worldly possessions? What, then, must I do to be truly poor in my state, to imitate as closely as possible Jesus, my model? In bad times, when retrenchment becomes necessary for a house, or when, God permitting it, a little hardness in superiors, or avarice in officers, shall give me occasion to suffer something, to want for something, I will suffer joyfully, and in the most profound silence. Never shall I be heard to complain of my food, clothing, or lodging, or that others are preferred before me. I will say to myself: How many would think themselves blessed to be as I am. If Jesus Christ had been provided with what is given to me, could He have been called poor? To the merit of suffering, I will add that of doing without a multitude of trifles, which nature, through a kind of avarice makes me ask or receive. I will often examine what I can retrench from what I use. In the use of things which I cannot do without, I will endeavor to practice poverty. Through a love of great simplicity, I will endeavor to draw nearer to Jesus Christ. I will often say to myself: Between the poverty of Jesus Christ and mine, Oh! what a distance! His was sensible and

suffering; mine is less a privation than a grace. His was humiliating and rendered Him contemptible and dependent in men's eyes. They looked upon Him as the son of a poor carpenter, and His poverty appeared suited to His station. His wants needed assistance, and made Him depend on creatures. Does my poverty bear the same character? Do not reasonable creatures respect us for having left all for Jesus Christ? Does not my poverty make me independent in regard to the world? . . . But, if the lowliness of my state should draw some contempt upon me from the world, or if my community should let me want for something in a time of sickness, or some real necessity, would not this be an occasion of praising God, and saying: "Thus was Jesus Christ treated, and what a happiness for me to resemble Him at least two or three times in my life." He came unto His own and His own received Him not. The forgetfulness shown me recalls the contempt and repulses that He experienced; dependence on my superiors, to which my vow of poverty essentially obliges me, reminds me of that in which He lived. Woe to me, if, through independence, I would rather want for a thing than ask for it! I should then cease to be poor in mind and heart, and it is especially to this kind of poverty that the kingdom of heaven belongs. I should then cease to love true poverty, and my holy founders wish us to cherish it with a filial tenderness. This is the expression they use, and they would have this love consist in rejoicing at feeling the effects of poverty. Thus the greater number of those who laid the foundations of the houses of my institute acted. We find, in the history of the foundations, that all was wanting, and that they cherished their poverty, and always looked upon it as too easy and convenient. We read, that in proportion as those who succeeded them had the conveniences of life, they carried even to scruple their delicacy on the obligations of poverty. They would have regarded as a sort of sacrilege the loss of the smallest part of the goods that had been offered to God. They forgot themselves willingly, to think only of the good of the community, in order to leave to those who would follow them the fruit of their long and mortifying retrenchments.

And, as to permissions, the oldest even, broken with age and weakness, were seen to seek their superiors to ask to give, lend, or receive trifles. In what school had they learned the interior spirit that animated them in the practice of such poverty? In the school of Jesus Christ and my holy founders.

Teach me, also, O my divine Saviour, to cherish this virtue, which Thou hast consecrated in Thy person, to which Thou hast called me also by Thy grace, and the special privilege of my religious profession! Give me its spirit, that I may esteem and love it, and that it may be the object of my tender affection. May I be poor in effect, and still more so, in will. Far from me all desires, sentiments, fears, hopes, every complaint or murmur as to what may be wanting to me, or not to my taste! Far from me to seek or desire abundance in deprivation,—the pleasures of life in poverty! I will regard as an alms all that is given for my use. Far from me every shadow of attachment or independence! I will dispose of nothing but by the authority and in the name of religion, and with express permission. I will not presume on permissions, or act on those artfully gained, or too favorably interpreted. In the use of things even, I will remember, that the same authority which allows me the use of them, has always the right to dispose of them. Far from me all delicacy, all self-seeking; I will refuse all superfluity, and for my needs, will confine myself to what is necessary, to the greatest simplicity. I will not disturb the beautiful order of uniformity by adding thereto anything personal or singular. Far from increasing or extending what is absolutely necessary, I will think only of curtailing as much as I am permitted, so as to approach nearer the state of Jesus Christ's poor. For His sake, I wish to be poor, as He was. There must be no reserve in the holocaust I have offered Him.

Have I, in order to avoid its perils, despoiled myself of the goods of the world, only to run the risk of, perhaps, greater dangers in religious poverty? Having broken the strongest chains, shall I allow myself to be surprised, and held captive by weak bonds? Have I made the vow of poverty only to lose all its merit before God? Will I

lie to the Holy Ghost, by taking back a portion of what I have consecrated to Him? I have purchased the kingdom of heaven by poverty, which is its price: why will I lose this precious treasure, by retaining the smallest part of what I have offered and given? No, Lord, I wish to be poor in heart and body. To whatever deprivation, this poverty may lead me, it will never be such as Thine; it will never be comparable to the heavenly gifts which Thou hast promised to it here below, or to that infinite recompense Thou hast destined for it in heaven.

FIFTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.—ON MORTIFICATION.

First Point.

“BECAUSE for Thy sake, we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter.”—Ps. xliii., 22.

Man in the state of innocence tended to good without any difficulty. His passions were subject to his reason, and his reason to God. Man sinned, and his disobedience drew upon him the indignation of God. If he was not condemned like the angels, it was because the divine mercy had pity on the frailty of his nature. God even gave him His own Son for a Redeemer. But, notwithstanding this ineffable benefit, man, in punishment of his revolt, will feel within himself and in his posterity a part of the vengeance of God. The soul which commands the passions, the senses, the understanding, the memory, the will, will become the master of them; but, if it is subject to them, she can only, with a great effort, afterwards resume the right she has lost. It is only with violence that we can now do good. The germ of concupiscence, which we have inherited from Adam, incessantly produces fruits of death, and it is only by mortification that we can weaken, not destroy it. Every christian must wage a war against himself, to live according to the spirit,

amidst the continual assaults of his passions. But a religious, who owes her very name to true and solid mortification, who should be truly dead to herself, and always conformed to Jesus Christ, is more especially obliged to this. A penitent for her own sins, a public penitent for the salvation of men, what mortification do not these titles impose on her? St. Francis of Sales, after St. Paul and the Council of Trent, requires that she bear the mortification of Jesus Christ in her body, and become like Him by a crucified life. Now, what was the mortification of our divine Redeemer? From the first instant that He appeared on earth, until the moment of His great sacrifice on Calvary, He carefully embraced every occasion of mortifying Himself interiorly and exteriorly. Soon after His birth, He offered the first fruits of His Blood, as a pledge of the resolution He had formed, to shed even the last drop of it. In the crib He combated, by His destitution, all the natural desires of man for riches, honors, pleasures and liberty; and what He did on entering into the world, He did until He went out of it. To prove to us the necessity of mortification, He wrought a miracle by suffering in His Body, and refusing it the impassability which His soul enjoyed. This God of goodness, who worked prodigies to mitigate for some of the martyrs the sensation of their pains, chose to work one, that He might Himself, be capable of suffering everything. He never granted any satisfaction to His senses. He lived with coarse and imperfect Apostles; He patiently supported and concealed their imperfections; He foresaw and permitted their treasons. He was consumed with zeal for the glory of His father, Whom He saw dishonored. He foresaw and suffered incessantly the torments of His passion. In a word, sufferings of body and of mind, mortification of the senses and the heart, abnegation, and absolute renunciation, these were his examples and maxims. Such, also, were the precepts and conduct of the saints, and particularly of St. Francis of Sales and St. Chantal. Animated by the same spirit as Jesus Christ, their mortification extended to the least things. They deprived themselves of all that could give them any satisfaction; they retrenched every pleasure and convenience; they

granted nothing to their taste, refused everything to their senses, and even converted the reliefs which nature demanded into occasions of sacrifice and suffering. Their interior mortification surpassed infinitely the exterior. The heaviest blows were dealt on the heart. There the war was continual, and without relaxation. Always occupied in eradicating and destroying, they had so perfectly conquered nature, that the virtues most opposite to their characters, meekness and moderation in one, detachment and contempt for the world in the other, had become natural to them. How many motives for a Religious of the Visitation to esteem, love, and embrace mortification? Excesses are forbidden by the Rule, and she should, scrupulously, avoid them. But, at the same time, should she not distrust self-love, which often covers itself with the cloak of discretion and obedience to avoid evangelical penance. We know well that we should not overburden ourselves; this would even be a fault in the eyes of religion; but is this fault much to be feared, in the greater part? Are superiors now constrained to use their authority to moderate fervor? Constitutions are weaker, but, would we not have more strength if we had more zeal for our advancement? Discretion is only recommended to those who might go too far. We do not go too far, whilst we preserve sufficient strength to follow the Rule, and be useful to the house. But those who labor most in a community, are, almost always, those who are most mortified; whilst those, who are idle or less occupied, are always the most anxious to procure themselves conveniences and gratifications, and the most disposed to complain and murmur, when anything is wanting to them. As to obedience, it is true that nothing should be done, on this point, without the permission of superiors. Such is the spirit of our holy founders, who often condemn in their writings, the disobedience which reigns in excessive mortifications. But, when they require us to render an account to our superiors, is it not that they may judge if we do enough, as well as if we do too much? When they prescribe obedience, they require that of mortifying one's self in what the rule and superiors ordain. This mortification of the body, besides being a precept, also

satisfies for sin. Now, have we not many to expiate? It keeps the flesh in servitude, and usually represses its revolts. It draws upon us, those graces of preservation which we need so much. It prepares us to receive the heavenly light and to enjoy the delights of the spirit; is not this lively and pure faith what is wanting to us, and what we should the most desire? It renders us conformable to Jesus Christ, and has not a religious, above all, promised to imitate Him?

But, the solid mortification, a religious should more particularly imitate in our Saviour, is the self-renunciation and abnegation, of which He has set her the example. The most crucifying austerities are not always the most efficacious against self-love, whose subtle poison often finds means to insinuate itself even into these very austerities. The violence done to the body does not always reach the heart, and we sometimes see very lively passions in a mortified flesh. We fulfil to the letter, and even to scrupulosity, the mortifications ordered by the Rule, and would be ashamed to ask or accept dispensations. It often happens, that believing ourselves inspired to do more, we solicit, and even extort permissions which authorize an increase of mortifications. But what becomes of this love for mortification, when there is question of turning it against the inclinations of the heart? Frequently nothing is less dead, in an attenuated and dying body, than pride. Often this vice still animates and influences all its actions. Concentrated in the heart, it lies there in peace, with all the refinements of sensuality, with all the love of independence, with all possible aversion to constraint, with all the delicacies, vanities, artifices, and the most natural and immortal passions and affections. One passes for, or at least, looks upon herself as austere and crucified; but how do we act, when it is necessary to mortify our tongue and keep silence; to mortify our eyes, and guard them; to mortify our palate and renounce our taste; to mortify our sensuality and retrench some convenience and satisfaction? We grow thin through excessive austerities, but, how do we act on those occasions, when it is indispensable to mortify our mind, and repress a retort; to mortify our vanity and bear an in-

jury; to mortify our will and bend to obedience, to mortify our inclinations and make incessant war against them?

Second Point.

O my God! I acknowledge that I have deceived myself. I have taken some practices of mortification for mortification itself. I have dealt some blows, but in the air, since they did not attack my heart, which is my most powerful enemy. Better instructed in the manner of combating it, I will destroy it little by little, by fatiguing it without ceasing; I will refuse it all that it asks; I will take from it all that pleases it; I will subject it to all that can restrain or contradict it. I will make it feel in everything a continual and unremitting mortification. A single day given to this terrible adversary would strengthen it more, than entire years could weaken it. I will remember that the penance I ought to do for my sins should be a supplement, a compensation, and as a representation of the pains of hell, which they have merited; consequently, that it should be in some manner infinite, having no limits save those which obedience enjoins; it should have a sort of eternity, that is to say, last as long as my life. Whatever I suffer through mortification is not comparable to that which is remitted by it; its pains will be momentary and supportable, whilst in hell I would suffer eternally without relief.

All those who belong to Thee, O Jesus, have crucified their flesh, with its concupiscences. We cannot follow Thee but in carrying our cross. All the saints, particularly my holy founders, have mortified their bodies, lest they should lose their souls. What a shame then for me, not only to spare a criminal body, but, even to indulge and pamper it. What a confusion for me, O divine Jesus, if, at Thy judgment, Thou shouldst compare me with persons, who in the world, have been more mortified than I; who clothe themselves with instruments of penance and refuse the most innocent pleasures! What reproaches Thou wilt make me, if I treat myself in religion with more delicacy and attention, than those whose state in the world gives them, it seems, more right to indulge them-

selves! Oh body of death, the source of so many disorders, will you always be the object of my cares? No, with the permission of those who govern me, I will wage open war against you. Until now, I have feared the undertaking, because I have been ignorant of how much I could do, through the power of grace.

With the help of grace, I will crucify the old man, by the austerities prescribed by my Rule, above all, when the flesh rises against the spirit, and causes me to feel that law of my members of which the Apostle speaks. I will make of my body, a living victim, agreeable in thine eyes, O Lord! I will exercise upon it that holy hatred which Thou dost so strongly recommend in the Gospel. The multitude of the sins I have committed, the health and strength I have, the attraction I feel, and above all the advice of my superiors will be the rules which I will follow, that I may not fail through indiscreet zeal or too great laxity. I will always bear in my exterior the modesty of which my holy founder gives the rules. I will avoid those affected manners and worldly airs which are especially forbidden. I will seek no unnecessary satisfactions, for my food, bed, and clothing, etc. I will desire nothing but what the community receives. I will be exact in rising at the precise hour. This exactitude shall extend to all my exercises. I will apply myself to the labor and occupations which are in accordance with my duty, and not follow my natural inclinations. I will moderate that excessive tenderness, which makes me complain so easily and seek to be pitied. I will retrench absolutely all dangerous pleasures; I will moderate and regulate even those which are innocent, because they cease to be so when taken without rule or moderation. I will sometimes abstain, through a spirit of penance, from the most permitted pleasures, or at least I will disengage my mind and heart from them. I will renounce or refer them to God. I will make a compact with my eyes and ears, that I may neither see nor hear what might sully mind or heart, for fear of losing purity or hearing detraction. I will mortify the sense of smell in all that can flatter it. Everywhere, and in all things, I will overcome my senses and subject nature to the hardest combats.

I will apply myself especially to interior mortification, to that of my heart, my mind, my humor, my passions, my inclinations, my desires, and my self-will. I will renounce myself continually, and make a perpetual sacrifice of myself. I will repress all the sallies of my pride; I will study to have no will about anything. I will become as simple as a child, dependent on my Rule and my superiors. I should even be dependent on my equals, in all that is permitted, and which can humble me.

I will teach self-love to be contented with little, and not to desire every thing it sees, and what others have. I will keep an exact silence. I will never say anything of those, of whom I cannot speak well. I will speak without warmth, without exaggeration, and without precipitation. I will never desire to appear witty at the expense of charity, or to flatter my vanity or pride. I will not seek certain confidential persons to open to them my heart, at the expense of my neighbor. I will retrench all vain curiosity. I will become indifferent to everything that does not concern my salvation. Far from occupying myself with the news of the world, I will withdraw from it as much as I can. I will turn away my mind from useless thoughts; will restrain its levity and distractions by assiduous labor, prayer, and good reading. I will deprive myself of books that only serve to gratify my vanity or curiosity, or to flatter sensuality. I will not permit my imagination to dwell upon what may aggravate me. I will never let the sun set upon a resentment, how well founded soever it may be. I will be gentle and kind to those persons for whom I feel some aversion, or with whom I may not be pleased. Far from using cutting raileries against them, I will seek to meet and converse with them, and will always treat them with sweetness and respect. I will never reprehend any one whilst agitated, but wait until I become calm. I will not excuse myself, unless charity, edification, or obedience require it. I will moderate my natural activity, and a too eager manner of acting even in regard to the best things. When I feel too strong an inclination to do anything, if it is useless, I will renounce it; if it is good and useful, I will suspend my action until I have suppressed my vivacity. By my fidelity

in observing all these good practices, so recommended by my holy founders, I will hope to become a religious, established on Mount Calvary for the service of Jesus crucified, who should always have this Model before her eyes, and never give herself the liberty of using her heart, eyes, or tongue, except through love for this crucified Spouse.

Bless, O my God, these generous resolutions; and strengthen them by Thy grace. To succeed in this holy warfare. I need Thy assistance, and confidently expect it from Thy grace and Thy love for me. Oh my Jesus, immolated on the cross for my salvation, teach me to love entire renunciation of self, which destroys sin and works out salvation. Animate me with a holy hatred against my flesh, senses, and passions, that I may become by mortification, the instrument of Thy justice against myself, that I may avoid Thy vengeance and merit Thy love.

FIFTH DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.—ON CROSSES AND SUFFERINGS.

First Point.

“IN all things we suffer tribulation, but are not distressed: we are straitened, but are not destitute: we suffer persecution, but are not forsaken; we are cast down, but we perish not.”—II Cor. iv., 9., 8.

God, in becoming man and immolating Himself for us, has attached to sufferings an infinite merit and satisfaction. The cross, which before His death, was an infamous punishment, has no longer that character for christians. Jesus Christ has attached to it a glory which surpasses all greatness. To suffer is no longer an evil, since a God has said: “Blessed are they who suffer,” since He, Himself, has suffered. O treasure, contained in crosses, how precious you are to those who know your advantages! What greater blessing can there be, than to have some

resemblance with Jesus Christ? But, especially what an honor, what an advantage for a religious to be truly conformed to her crucified Spouse. The only thing that can enable her to endure her exile is to be treated here like Jesus Christ. All her riches are contained in sufferings which draw her to Him, and which are, for her, the germ of the felicity to which she tends. It is only by suffering that she can worthily glorify her God. It is only by uniting her sufferings to those of her divine Saviour, that she can truly belong to Him. If, then, her mind, her heart, and her body are upon the cross, it is the surest proof of the love of her God, Who treats her as He treated His only Son. If, even the unction of the cross is taken from her, she does not lose courage. The apparent abandonment, which Jesus Christ experienced in the garden of Olives, and on Calvary, leads her to abandon herself so much the more to Him as He tries her more severely. She knows that love is hidden under the sword that strikes her; that the hand which humbles her is to crown her, and that she will have more centuries to reign, than moments to suffer. These motives raise her above all misfortunes. There is no kind of affliction to which they do not present a remedy. If her body is reduced to habitual infirmities, she remembers the blessed immortality, in which her flesh will change its nature, and become like that of her Redeemer. If her heart languishes with pain at the sight of her own faults, and so many other offences which outrage the glory of God, she is strengthened in the thought, that the time approaches, when a crown and a kingdom await her, and when her God shall be universally glorified. If her mind is filled with perplexities and scruples, which make her doubt the mercy of God, believing that He is displeased; if hell seems to open under her feet, she looks forward to that port which opens to her a safe asylum, where the day is without a cloud, joy without sorrow, and grace without the fear of losing it. Thus, after the example of the prophets, she derives a variety of consolations even from the diversity of her pains. She enjoys the sufferings that are to render her eternally happy in the land of the living. Animated by this thought, she becomes

not simply patient in her crosses, but she even loves and desires them. "O amiable cross!" she exclaims with St. Andrew; "O good and precious cross, which I have long desired! I am filled with consolation and joy, in the midst of my pains." She says, with St. Paul: "I rejoice in my tribulations,"—with St. Teresa, "O Lord, let me suffer or die." "No, my God," she adds with St. Magdalen de Pazzi, "let me not die so soon, that I may suffer longer." "I wish no other joy," says she with her holy mother, "than that which is to be found on Calvary with Jesus crucified." "What can disturb the peace of my heart?" continues she with her holy founder. "If everything in nature, within and without me, should be turned upside down, it should not trouble me."

In the first moment of affliction, some complaint may escape her, but this involuntary surprise cannot render her guilty. Flesh and blood often speak before the spirit, reason, and grace, even in the most just souls. But after having granted to nature the first moments, she remembers Jesus Christ, the Author and Perfecter of her faith. She throws herself at the foot of the cross, which love for her made Him ascend, and there the Spouse of her soul seems to say to her; "What have I not done to shelter you from eternal evils? It is only the present evils I would not avert from you. In what can you better resemble me than in suffering? Compare your sufferings with Mine, and you will find them light. Take yours through gratitude for Mine, and you will find them amiable. Endure them for Me, with Me, and like Me, and they will become sweet to you."

"Yes," says St. Francis of Sales, "if jealousy could enter into heaven, the angels would be jealous, not only of the sufferings of God for man, but also of those endured by man for God." He says, elsewhere, that sufferings are like a fund, which is to produce another. God gives us the interest in this life, which consists in unction, grace, and spiritual joy. The other fund is glory, eternal glory. What do we bring on our side to this contract? Scarcely anything; some momentary pains suffered with patience, and God on His side gives His grace, His love, His protection, and His Kingdom. Our resig-

nation calls Him to our aid. He comes ; His presence is felt, He is with us in tribulation, He carries the greater portion of our burden, He aids us to bear the remainder ; He consoles us, He dries our tears, sanctifies and crowns them. Could we count our sufferings for much, could we even count them for anything, if those of Jesus Christ were deeply engraven on our hearts, if they were strongly impressed on our memories ? Everything would become light to us, or at least supportable. Whatever nature might say, we would answer it, that we suffer nothing in comparison with our Saviour, and if it costs us something, it is not as with Him to the shedding of blood. We would say to ourselves, that if we cannot live upon the cross, we can die on it, and that it is better to die on it, than to live and die without penance.

This should be the language, especially of a Religious of the Visitation, whose state, according to her holy founders, is a state of penance. "This daughter of Calvary," said St. Francis of Sales, "in embracing her profession, should have wished to embrace everything that is inseparably attached to it." In pronouncing her vows, she promised to follow Jesus Christ, and to walk in the same way He did, which is a way of suffering. The more, therefore, our Lord multiplies her crosses, the more He wishes to perfect in her the image of her Spouse, and the more she should conform herself to her Model. Those trials, especially, which are not sweetened by consolations, should have particular charms for her, if her faith be strong in the Man of sorrows. Thus she suddenly passes from lights, consolations, the sweetness of a tender piety, into darkness, desolation, and aridities. Her imagination is troubled by a thousand phantoms. Her will opposed to everything that is good ; her soul afflicted and overwhelmed by mortal fears, and the weight of God's anger, Whom she can only view as a judge, no longer as a merciful father. This pure cross, these privations she should consider as a pledge of the special love of her God, and as a means of proving her love for Him, by suffering all in silence. All her consolation should be to have no consolation on earth. She should remember that this life is not a time to enjoy but to suffer. Jesus Christ, was not only

crucified in the exterior, but still more in the interior. For her sake, He deprived Himself of the enjoyment of divine consolations, and it should be her glory and her joy to resemble Him, and to carry with and for Him some small portion of the cross. These truths, meditated and reflected on, should restore calm to her heart, banish trouble from her mind, and perplexity from her soul. She should no longer be anxious about things which require fidelity; nor should she become painfully excited when she has been unfaithful. Experience should have taught her, that disquietude on this point often causes many other, and more important duties to be neglected. Her holy founders tell her, that fidelity can be required only in things that present themselves in a distinct and peaceful manner, and in which, it is evident, we can subject ourselves, without losing our peace, and without neglecting any prescribed duty. Therefore, she no longer imagines that all is lost, because she has been unfaithful; nor does she confound infidelity with mortal sin. She knows that these troubles and doubts are pure temptations, illusions. "I have failed," she says, according to the advice of St. Francis of Sales, "but I will rise again, and do better." She says this to herself a thousand times, and peaceably resumes her exercises, to fulfil them with more fervor and fidelity.

Second Point.

At the sight of Thy Cross, O my Jesus, can I complain of my sufferings? Thou, the only Son of God, that God of glory, to Whom is due by nature all respect and veneration in a sovereign degree; Thou, Who, if Thou wert not God, should as man expect gratitude from those, whom Thou hast favored by so many benefits; Thou, Man-God, in whose power it was not to suffer; what hast Thou not suffered, to encourage me to walk in Thy footsteps! Who am I, that I should refuse to suffer? I, a worm of the earth, a vessel of clay in the hands of the Potter, Who has made it, and Who can break it to pieces at His pleasure. I am more dependent on Thee, O Lord, than a vile insect is upon man, who gives himself the arbitrary dominion of life and death over it. Who

am I? A sinner, voluntarily criminal, by the multitude of my faults; a victim, a hundred times escaped from hell, and deserving from my first crime the fate experienced by the reprobate angels. Who am I? A criminal insupportable, perhaps, even to my neighbor, who has the right to demand of Thee, as being the common Master of all, justice against me. But, supposing that I am innocent, who am I compared with Thee, O Jesus crucified. Should I desire or expect better treatment than Thyself? Should I not esteem myself happy to have some resemblance to Thee? Even supposing that I am just, would I wish to have nothing to lay at the foot of Thy Cross? I find there Thy adorable Blood, shed for the salvation of my soul. Should I not at least mingle my tears with this precious Blood? Unite my feeble sufferings with Thy immense pains? I will suffer then, O my God, and suffer without complaining. I will suffer with patience and resignation; yes, with joy. If Thy arm should weigh heavily upon me; if all creatures should unite against me; if all evils should burst upon my head; if the fire of fever should consume me; if I should feel the most acute pains in every part of my body, if the most humiliating diseases should assail me, if fears, anxieties, and doubts should torment my mind, I will say to myself; Jesus has suffered all this; God treats me as He treated His only Son. Without examining His reasons, ought I not submit to His will? Is He not the Master? Is not His will the rule of all justice? But what can I suffer that I have not deserved? And how often has he shown me mercy? My sins merited hell, and through an effect of Thy great mercy, Thou hast been pleased to change the eternal punishments which were in reserve for me, into some temporal pains which will soon finish. What a grace! What a favor! Thou hast suffered, O divine Jesus, and Thou hast suffered for me; I may have suffered, but was it for Thee? Was it not for myself? By my sufferings I perfect in myself, what is wanting to my redemption. I suffer, and by a day of pain, I redeem, perhaps, years of suffering in the next life. I suffer, and in suffering may perfect myself in the most sublime virtues, patience, resignation, humility, contempt of the

world, hatred of self, charity for my neighbor, and love of God. I suffer, to unite myself more closely to Thee. We resemble Thee only in as much as we suffer; all my glory, henceforth, shall be to resemble Thee.

O Lord! Instructed by Thy example, and supported by Thy grace, I will renounce my natural will, which has a horror of trials, and I will submit my reason and will to Thine. Henceforth, far from revolting or murmuring, thus adding to Thy sufferings, I will kiss Thy hand when it humbles me, and thus I will console Thee in Thy sorrows. I will accept all evils which bear the seal of thy will, all except that of sin, which Thou canst not will. A thousand times, too, happy will I be to drink some drops of the chalice which Thou didst drain to the dregs for love of me. O my God, when I see Thee laden with a heavy cross for my salvation, I can no longer live without the cross. Strike, Lord, as Thou judgest best; use whatever instruments, whatever means please Thee; I submit with respect to all. If Thou art pleased with my services, as recompense I ask Thee for the cross; if Thou art displeased with me, avenge Thyself and send me the cross. I will pity myself only because Thou dost spare me too much, and dost not bury the sword deep enough in me. If Thou dost not judge me worthy of suffering the martyrdom of blood, grant me that of the cross, upon which I wish to live and die, fastened by the nails of Thy love. Oh, tender Father! Who hast engendered me in sorrow, as another Abraham, immolate me by Thy own hand; or rather make me, as another Isaac, worthy of Thee, by the trial of my fidelity. Separate, Lord, the straw from the wheat, that is to say, try me; purify me by suffering, that I may be worthy of Thee and of my state. Consider tenderly, the interests of my soul. Let it resemble Thee by the glorious marks which will merit for me, the crown that Thy just and liberal hand destines for those who suffer as Thou didst with Thee and for Thee. Chastise, retrench, burn now, provided that Thou dost spare me for eternity. I am ready to receive Thy chastisements with all the submission I owe Thee as my God, with all the tenderness due Thee as my Spouse. Strengthen my heart; sever it forever

from the false pleasures and consolations of this life; increase my courage in proportion to my tribulations. Let this heart suffer but through zeal to avenge Thee for what it owes Thy justice; let it suffer but through gratitude and esteem for sufferings, which Thou hast honored, consecrated, divinized in Thy person; let it suffer, but with pleasure because Thou dost find Thy glory in its humiliation; let it suffer but through love, because the time of trial is best fitted to love Thee; let it suffer but with joy, because tears are the portion of Thy elect; in a word, let it glory but in Thy cross. Grant, Lord, that I may be sustained under the weight of this burden, neither by the hope of future rewards, nor by the unction of interior consolation, but only by the strength of faith, and the desire of being more conformed to Thee.

To strengthen myself in this state of interior privation which is called, and which I have myself looked upon, as one of pain, abandonment and loss of salvation; and which is, in truth, but a loss of the lights, consolations, supports, and securities which nature and self-love seek, and lose only with extreme regret, behold, O my God, the holy resolutions which I take, and which are drawn from the great and sublime maxims of my holy founders.

I will no longer desire that my interior pains should diminish quickly. If Thou dost wish that my soul should be sad unto death, I will bless Thy adorable will, and notwithstanding the repugnance of nature, I will submit entirely. I will no longer seek either spiritual or sensible consolations; if Thou dost give them to me at intervals, I will not attach myself to them; I will make no effort to augment or prolong them. I will entertain, in the bottom of my heart, the firm resolution never to offend Thee, and will allow Thee to dispose of me as it will please Thee for time and eternity. If, in the virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, I feel neither light, support, or sensibility, I will, according to Thy intention, apply myself to become, by this privation and trial, more pure and spiritual. I will avoid, with care, the faults into which this painful state may cause me to fall; such as yielding to my humors; speaking harshly; being less docile to obedience; attracting to myself false compassion, or

reflecting on the greatness of my pains. I will do more, I will esteem and cherish this humiliating state, and I will thank Thee, Lord, that Thou dost thus destroy my pride and reduce me, to where I should keep myself in my nothingness. I will remain in this arid, deep nothingness, without ever leaving it in life or death. I will regard this despoiliation as a participation of that which Thou didst feel, when, on the cross, Thou didst appear to be abandoned by Thy Father. Like Thee, I will abandon myself to Him Who seems to abandon me, and if He wishes to leave me in this abandonment until death, as He left Thee, I will continue until death, to abandon myself to Him. Lord, preserve and augment more and more the sentiments with which Thou hast inspired me.

FIFTH DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION.—ABANDONMENT TO PROVIDENCE.

First Point.

“For your Father knoweth what is needful for you before you ask Him.—Matt. vi., 8.

St. Francis de Sales, interpreting these words of our Lord, said to his dear daughters: “O you, who are especially chosen, to be the adorers and servants for divine Providence, accept all happenings with indifference, and in perfect union of your will to that of God. Serve your Master cheerfully in all things, without considering whether the effect will be useful, profitable, or hurtful. It is enough for you to be assured that our divine Saviour loves very tenderly those, who suffer themselves to be governed by His Providence, and who are guided by it everywhere and in all things. He takes care of everything and conducts everything; therefore, your soul has nothing else to do, but to repose in His arms. There, all disquietudes and all eagerness cease. Never troubling herself about anything, she receives all events, and all the

variety of accidents, which may happen, with tranquility. Whoever is in the hands of God, whoever reposes in His bosom, and abandons herself to the care of His adorable wisdom, and to His paternal goodness has nothing to fear." "O holy abandonment! Virtue of virtues, alone worthy to be practised by the dearest children of God."

These maxims, the exercise of which, the holy bishop had rendered so common to himself, had so filled the heart of St. Chantal,* that she was always submissive to the orders and designs of God. The unexpected events, the multiplied tribulations, and violent trials which she experienced in her life, always found her, as it were, insensible to self. "What matters it whether we suffer or are happy," said she, "provided, the divine will be accomplished; must we not be as equally in repose in times of tribulation as in the hours of consolation? It is true virtue to accustom ourselves to do without many things, and to want very few." "A worthy daughter of our holy Father," she adds, "is a soul entirely abandoned to divine Providence, a soul unshaken at all times, who wishes only God, sees only God, attaches herself only to God; who, in fine, belongs entirely to God." A Religious of the Visitation, therefore, is called to a holy indifference about everything that is in the hands of our Lord; to the sublime virtue of self-abnegation, and of entire abandonment of herself to the designs of God, Who governs her. "She should," her holy founders tell her, "be certain, that the perfect and blind submission, which He requires of her cannot be imprudent. She should refrain from any reflections or reasonings upon what happens to her. Should our Lord place her upon a painful cross, she should remain there in silence, like Him, and await the orders of Him Who placed her there, to leave it. She should not depend upon herself, either by fear or hope, or by an anxious foresight of the future, or by an excessive joy in consolation, or by a too lively sensibility in desolation, or, in a word, by any act of her will, which then would cease to be the will of God. Health or sickness, life or death, good or bad success, contempt or honor, peace or temptations, taste or repugnance, consolation or desolation; all these

things should be equal to her. "Everything should appear good to her, when God wills it. Her conformity should be such, that she should will all that God wills; this is the object; all as God wills; this is the rule; all as God wills it; this is the motive." Her occupation, like that of the saints in heaven, should be to do all that He requires, without exception, without restriction, without reserve. She should correspond to the views of our Lord over her, without listening to her repugnances. In giving to God the substance of her actions, she must not reserve to herself the circumstances. This would be robbing God of a part of the sacrifice, and rendering herself guilty of theft in the holocaust, giving the tree, and keeping the fruit. Her motive in accomplishing the will of God should be that will itself. This motive should suffice, and take the place of every other reason. Thus, will she make a happy exchange of her will for that of God; that is to say of a human and always defective will, for one that is divine and perfect. An exchange which will be for her the inexhaustible source of all good.

God has His reasons for all that He wills and ordains, although we cannot always see and penetrate them. It is, therefore, useless, and even injurious to His greatness, to examine them too much, and to wish to dive into them. Let us listen, adore and obey. This is our duty, moreover, it is our advantage; we know not what is best for us. Our Father in heaven knows all, can do all, and He loves us. He sees what is good for us, where we see only evil. But, suppose there should be evil, can He not rectify it, and turn it to our good? Did He not refresh the three hebrew youths in the furnace? Our submission is so honorable to God, that He has a special care of those who abandon themselves to Him. When He sees us disposed to receive everything, from His hands, with thanksgiving, He is more particularly inclined to do us good. In the world, does not a generous man believe himself obliged to aid and serve those, who confidently give themselves up to his guidance?

How many motives has not a religious to conform herself interiorly and exteriorly to the will of God, to keep herself always in the situation in which He wills her to

be ; to regulate, according to his good pleasure, all the thoughts of her mind, all the desires of her heart, all the words of her mouth, all the actions of her hands, all the powers of her soul, and all the movements of her body? She should continually say to herself, what is it that God wishes me to think, to desire? How does He wish me to act on this occasion? No matter what it costs, I will, in all things, follow His good pleasure. My will should be entirely annihilated before His, that His may be perfectly accomplished in me. All the affections of my heart shall have Thee, O Lord, for object. It shall be my joy to accomplish Thy holy will, my sadness to have failed in fidelity to Thee ; my fear, not to follow Thy views ; my hope, to fulfil Thy designs ; and thus with all the other movements of my heart. Thy glory, shall be my glory ; Thy pleasure my pleasure ; Thy felicity, my felicity. I shall want no other consolation than that of being able to say or think ; I am where God wills me to be, and if He wills it, here will I die. From the arms of His providence, shall I not pass into the arms of His mercy. But in this consoling state, I must not seek too much my own satisfaction. I must desire this state, only inasmuch as, Thou, Lord, wilt it. I must be entirely transformed into Thy will. Mine, must be no more, I must no longer be anything but the will of God in me. "This is the conduct of a true servant of God," says St. Francis of Sales, "To-day, she does faithfully what our Lord requires of her ; to-morrow she shall again do what He requires of her ; and always this, without caring about anything else." She is blindly submissive, like St. Paul at the moment of his conversion, and says, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" The divine will is the star upon which her eyes are fixed during the voyage of life. She places all her affections in the hands of God, that they may be moulded and fashioned to His liking and good pleasure. She receives, with indifference and submission, the temptations and contradictions which happen in the spiritual life. Of what importance is it to her, to be on Thabor or Calvary, in this state or that, when she seeks only the will of her Spouse? She even renounces her pretended right of judging what is best for her, leaving this care entirely to

Him, to whom it belongs, to judge and will for her whatever He pleases.

According to these maxims, it does not suffice for a religious of the Visitation to have an obedience of action in accomplishing the orders of God, and the duties of her rule. She should have, also, an obedience of immolation, by sacrificing her own views, her inclinations, and her judgment; by immolating her reason itself, as it is no longer reason, when opposed to legitimate obedience. The sacrifice of her will, according to St. Paul, should be renewed, as often as the sun renews its light on the earth. "I immolate myself daily," says the great Apostle, "under the sword of obedience." In this he did what the Son of God had done before him, and will continue to do to the end of the world, in the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Can a religious without submission assist worthily at this dread sacrifice, wherein Jesus Christ becomes obedient unto death for her salvation?

God rejected the fasts and sacrifices of His people, because they did their own will; what, then, will it be with regard to a religious, who establishes herself as the end of her actions, and refers everything to herself? Will not God, one day, demand a terrible vengeance for this selfish act which He regards as a theft? Even in this life, He punishes the want of docility and abandonment by interior troubles which desolate the soul, by pains of conscience, by doubts, by fears of her salvation. St. Francis of Sales says, "that these are the chastisements of a soul who refuses to abandon herself to Providence." As if God said to her; "You think you are wise enough to do these things without Me; I will let you alone, and you will see what will become of you." Thus, does God avenge His divine will, outraged by the want of confidence and resignation in His spouses. Do they become more conformed to His good pleasure? Alas! continues the holy bishop "all say to our Lord: I give myself to Thee without reserve; but how few embrace the practice of this perfect renunciation and absolute abandonment?"

Second Point.

Am I, O my God! one of those souls of whom our holy Founder speaks, "who gently rest in the arms of Thy Providence, and who, without inclining to either side, without wishing for any thing, find every thing good that comes from Thee?" Do I not think with regard to the greater part of things, as worldlings think of them? Do I not form desires, projects, of which the object is different, it is true, but whose impression is the same upon my heart? Does not the prosperity of my relations elate me? Does not their adversity afflict me? Am I not disquieted about the future? Do I not seek human supports? Do I not occupy myself about my health? Do I not spare it with ridiculous affectation? The sight or even thought of the least pain alarms me. Do I not fear death? How far I am, O my God! from remitting myself entirely into Thy Hands! Am I contented with the graces Thou givest me? Do I not murmur when natural consolations are refused me? Do I adore Thy designs when Thou delayest to hear my prayers? Do I not incessantly ask Thee for a tender and purely sensible devotion? Do I not wish to perceive, each day, my progress in virtue? Do I not solicit unceasingly the gift of a more sublime spirit of prayer, Thy holy communications and favors? Do I not wish to dispose of Thy mercy, and of myself, at my pleasure? In fine, do I not consult my own inclinations, will, and desires? What a folly? In the order of nature is it not the first cause that gives movement to the second? Why then should I, O my God, reverse this order, that my unjust and irregular will should rule Thine, which is justice and sanctity itself? Should I not, on the contrary, will all that Thou wilt, and will nothing that Thou does not will? How much is comprised in these few words? To will nothing that Thou dost not will is to banish sin entirely from my heart; and to will all that Thou wilt is to establish in it, all the virtues in their highest perfection.

Take, then, care of all, O my Jesus! and guide all. May I be able to say with our holy Father, "I remit to Thee all my interests, for time and eternity." Thy

paternal heart is most careful of mine ; Thou desirest to conduct me, and what is more advantageous for me ? May Thy will be done and not mine. What would it avail me to foresee what I could not prevent ? To count upon what I cannot keep ? Thou, O Lord, art sovereignly powerful, and all beings should submit to Thee. Thou alone art sovereignly wise, and there is nothing done in the world which is not known to Thy infinite wisdom. Thou alone art sovereignly powerful, and all that happens to us is a proof of Thy ineffable goodness.

To refuse to submit to Thee, would be to wish to take from Thee, Thy power, to condemn Thy wisdom and accuse Thy goodness, to will that Thou shouldst not be my God, and to aspire to be Thine. Ah ! far from me such impious sentiments. I will submit forever to Thy dispositions, because it is just that Thou shouldst govern, as it pleases Thee, a heart of which Thou art the only and sovereign Lord. I revere Thy guidance, because nothing wiser can be imagined. I will receive with love and gratitude all that happens to me, because I can desire nothing more advantageous. Alas ! Lord, I do not know my true interests. Blind as I am, like the sons of Zebedee, I most frequently know not what I ask. Thou knowest better than I what is good for me, and Thou lovest me infinitely more than I love myself ; do, then, with me as Thou wilt. I will look upon myself, in Thy hands, as an earthen vessel in the hands of the potter. Break, shatter, do with me all that will please Thee. All that comes from Thy Hand will be infinitely venerable to me. My conformity will be entire, my abandonment total and without reserve. I give up to Thee all that I am, have or hope to be, my mind and all my thoughts, my heart and all my affections, my life and all its moments, my hope and all its desires. I will all that Thou wilt ; I will only what Thou wilt, as Thou wilt, as long, and in the manner that Thou wilt. I will be submissive to all that Thou wilt and permittest. If Thou givest me consolation, may Thy holy Name be blessed, it is a favor I do not merit. If Thou sendest me trials, may Thy holy Name be blessed, they are punishments I have but too justly merited. I know not the particular and per-

sonal way by which Thou wishest to lead me to heaven ; Thou alone knowest the course of events, the chain of graces and helps necessary for my salvation. The care of my soul belongs to Thee, fidelity to me. Can that be far from Thy Heart, which is abyssed in Thy bosom ? I cast myself, then, into the bosom of Thy paternal mercy. I confide myself forever to Thy ineffable goodness,—I am no longer my own. As Sovereign dispose of me, in prosperity or adversity, sickness or health, life or death, in time and eternity. I will endure and suffer all that it will please Thee to send me. I will be abandoned, despised if Thou wilt ; I wish, even success and progress in perfection, only inasmuch as Thou wilt it. I sacrifice to Thy good pleasure and glory all my reasonings. Thou callest me and I will answer thee. All will be indifferent to me provided I give Thee the glory I have too often refused. I wish no other consolation in my submission than my submission itself. Let human motives, frivolous rewards be no longer proposed to me. I wish no other, O my God, than to glorify Thee by an abandonment, generous, absolute, prompt, and constant.

O, divine wisdom ! divine will ! I acknowledge that I have dishonored Thee, by that secret applause of my mind or industry which I have heretofore regarded as the cause of my success ; by the too great confidence I have had in self, my lights and creatures ; I will abandon myself to Thee, more particularly where I remark my presumption.

In times of suffering, in Thy most rigorous guidance I will not lose courage. Thou hast so often supported and waited for me ; in my turn, I will await Thee as long as the trial lasts. In my troubles I will not seek calmness by any other way than that of resignation and patience. On all occasions, whether those which happen in effect, or those which come to my mind, I will abandon myself to Thy orders, whether Thou dost wish to show forth Thy justice or manifest Thy mercy, to humble my pride, punish my iniquity, or try my virtue, that I may merit new graces. I accept all with the same motive which Thou wilt have in sending them. I will adore Thy judgments, when Thou dost punish relatives and friends guilty of

abusing Thy benefits. I will espouse Thy interests by submitting to Thy dispositions, and by uniting myself to Thy Saints, who rejoice at the glory Thou dost find, in sinners bearing the just chastisement of their sins.

I will neither pity myself, nor be troubled at my want of talent, mind, memory, judgments, knowledge, or ability. Thou hast not wished to give me more ; O my God such is Thy will, a thousand times dearer to me than the rarest talents. If I have no perfections, I will rejoice that Thou dost possess them all, and united to Thee I will possess them in Thee.

I will not envy the robust health of others if mine is weak, I cannot do so without desiring to withdraw from the order of Thy will, and Thy interests should be dearer to me than my own. I will not even wish the high degrees of grace, perfection, and sanctity, to which Thou hast raised the saints, and to which I am not destined. If Thou hast resolved to draw from me only a small measure of glory, I will adore Thy divine dispositions. To wish what Thou dost not will of me, under pretext of sanctity and perfection, can only be the effect of a secret vanity and an irregular love of my own excellence. . . . However, I will not make less effort to rise to the highest sanctity, because Thou dost order me to aspire thereto ; but I will remain peaceful and contented, although Thou dost not forearm me with the graces with which Thou didst forearm Thy saints, and by the help of which they reached the highest degree of perfection.

I will never engage in any action or undertaking, without believing, in good faith, that it is Thou who requirest it of me. I will not even pray for my own needs, or public necessities, but because it is Thy will that I pray Thee to provide for them.

To correspond perfectly, and in all to this divine will, I will try to understand the designs Thou hast over me. I will be attentive to the distribution Thou makest of Thy gifts and graces ; to the different states in which Thou dost place me ; the various events which happen to me. Henceforth, I will conceive and understand, by the few qualities of body and mind, which it has pleased Thee to give me ; by the great number of sins Thou hast permit-

ted me to commit in Thy sight ; by the faults and imprudences into which Thou hast suffered me to fall before others ; and by the little success I have in all I undertake ; I will understand by all these things, that Thou dost demand of me, a profound humility and a perfect annihilation of self, since Thou dost give me so many pressing motives to humble and annihilate myself. I will understand, henceforth, by the fiery temperament and strong health which Thou hast given me, that Thou demandest of me great fervor, and I will employ all my vivacity and health in loving and serving Thee. By the little consolation and fidelity I find in creatures, Thou showest me that Thou desirest to be my only support and consolation. I wish, O my God, with the assistance of Thy merey, to know and fulfil Thy designs, and to serve Thee henceforth, with total and absolute abandonment ; an abandonment, continual, eternal, and irrevocable. O my God may this perfect abandonment commence from this moment, and continue during my whole life ; may it be renewed at the moment of death, may it be my last thought, my last sentiment, my last sigh ; may it remit my soul into Thy hands, to bless, praise, and love Thee forever.

FIFTH DAY.

CONFERENCE.—ON OBEDIENCE.

“HE that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. And they that resist, purchase to themselves damnation.”—Romans, xiii., 2.

If every disobedience to lawful power incurs the chastisement of God, what has not a religious to fear, who, having made the vow of obedience, does not obey ? The Scripture treats, as an Idolater, every man who, instead of viewing God as the lawful power, makes a God of his own will and judgment. What name must we give to a religious, who, after having by the vow of obedience, placed herself as a victim upon the altar of the living God, with-

draws from it by her revolts, and places herself upon the altar of the demon? Who renounces the august quality of child and servant of God, which she received at her profession, to become the child and servant of Belial? All the masters of the spiritual life agree in saying, that those who violate obedience, which is the most essential of all the vows, are apostates from their state, because they really quit it before God, when they leave the ways of docility. They are, they say, monsters of hell, since, like the devils, they refuse to submit to the orders of God, Who commands them through their superiors. It even seems, they add, that there is in their disobedience, a certain malice character, which is not met with in the devils. They, never having made a vow of obedience, did not commit a sacrilegious breach of their promise, in disobeying God. "The indocile religious," says St. Francis of Sales, "finds, like the first man, her loss in her rebellion, whereas, she would have found her crown in submission. When, like Adam, she throws off the yoke of obedience, like him, she loses the dominion she had over creatures; that is, she will feel the revolt of her powers. She will not obey her Master, and her slaves shall give her the law." "What is more just," he adds, after St. Bernard, "than that she should feel an internal struggle against her rights and authority, since she has made war against the Author of her life?" "If we are not obedient, and submissive," says St. Chantal, commenting on these principles of the holy bishop, "we are but phantoms of religious. Whoever vows obedience, and afterwards seeks to rule her employments, her abode or direction, withdraws from her vow. After having died for God, she again lives through the demon of self-love, and no longer lives but for him."

These truths will clearly appear, if we examine the sanctity of the principles that establish religious obedience. It is founded upon the authority of God Himself, which resides in superiors. This authority has not, indeed, been communicated to them, by Jesus Christ in person, but by Jesus Christ represented in His Vicar, and in all the powers of the Church lawfully ordained. This is of faith. Jesus Christ declares it Himself, saying: "He that hears you, hears Me; he that despises you, despises

Me." A religious should, therefore, be persuaded, that she does the will of God, when obedience is suggested to her by her superiors. She should believe that it is God who speaks to her, and commands, when her superiors speak and command things that are not contrary to the law of God. A religious, who acts thus, according to faith and supernatural views, cannot fail to become perfect. Mother de Chantal says, that nothing can shake such a one in the time of temptation. "But," adds she, "she must neither consider the person who commands, nor the thing commanded, whether they be to her liking or not; for whilst she looks upon the creature, as only a creature, she will never do anything good." The obligation she is under of obeying, exists, independently of the imperfections and weaknesses of superiors; independently of the contradictions of her mind, and the repugnance of her heart. Notwithstanding all the defects she may discover in those who govern her, she owes them respect; or rather, it is God she should respect in their persons.

She should believe that what they say to her, is the word of God, that what they order is His will. It is never lawful to censure their conduct, to murmur at it, or to listen to the murmurs of others. She should remember and persuade others, that God permits weaknesses in superiors, only to increase the merits, and to try the obedience of inferiors. The devil, or our own malice often leads us to remark defects in superiors, as the Jews did in the person of Jesus Christ, to disgust us with them, and prevent us from profiting by their lessons.

Embarrassed, as they are, by so many cares, and exposed to so many occasions, it would be morally impossible for them, even if they were saints, not to commit some faults. And is it not very unjust to have no regard for the weakness of human nature, in paths so slippery? They, who are the most ardent in condemning superiors, would commit much more grievous faults if they occupied their places if they had the same temperaments, were equally agitated within by their passions, and moved by the impression of exterior objects, the contradictions, chagrins, and displeasures inseparable from their functions. We have no need of eyes to obey; ears alone are necessary.

We should not consider what superiors do, but what they say. It matters not, for us, whether they do or do not what they command; whether they be perfect or imperfect. They are not to be obeyed because they have virtue and merit, but because they carry the orders of God, and are, in the hands of divine Providence, instruments to execute His designs.

But, if notwithstanding, the practice of obedience seems hard to the religious soul, let her fix her eyes upon her divine Spouse, Who came from heaven not to do His own will, but that of His Father who sent Him. He made it His food and occupation during His whole life, how rigorous soever it might be. All His steps, all His virtues, all His sufferings, His birth, life, mission, death, cross, everything in Him was regulated by this holy will. Let her contemplate the extent of His obedience. He obeys without distinction all those who hold for Him the place of God, whether they be faithful like Mary and Joseph, or unfaithful like Pilate and Herod. He obeys those in office, without complaining either of their conduct, or of the Providence which placed them there. He leaves to God the care of rectifying their defects, and of even referring their passions to His designs. Let us consider His motives; He obeys only His Father, in executing the will of man; "You would have no power, over Me," said He to Pilate, "were it not given you from above." In fine, let her lift her eyes to Calvary! There she will see her divine Spouse, bleeding, crowned with thorns, and all covered with wounds. Behold, what obedience cost Him; behold the divine Model she should imitate. Should not the example of Jesus Christ confound and destroy all the vain pretexts of her pride, and annihilate in all her self-will?

If this grand model, so elevated and perfect does not yet touch her as it ought, let her, meditate upon the life of her holy founders. What virtue was more seen in St. Francis de Sales, than obedience? His ambition was to obey, not to command. He saw no danger in living in submission, and it appeared to him, unworthy that a man should command, after God had obeyed. The title of foundress and first superioress of the Order did not hinder

St. Chantal from giving the most perfect example of obedience. More jealous of obeying than of commanding, how often did she not seek to be deposed. When they complied with her earnest entreaties, she was so submissive and dependent, so respectful to every superior, that it seemed as if she never had been anything but a simple religious. In them, whoever they were, she only considered their place, not their persons. She said, with St. Francis de Sales, that we should attach ourselves to the spirit, not to the body. "It seems to me," said she, "that I should have more satisfaction in obeying the least of our sisters, who should do nothing but contradict me, and command me in a harsh, and severe manner, than the most capable and experienced in the whole order." Do not these sentiments impose upon us the obligation of a blind submission to superiors, however destitute they may be of qualities to command, even if inferior in age, prudence, capacity, and virtue? But how far must this obedience extend?

St. Francis of Sales says, "that we must obey carefully, faithfully, promptly, simply, frankly, and cordially."

First, carefully; that is, in doing everything confided to her with the greatest possible care and perfection, however lowly or abject it may appear, however hard or contrary to her inclinations. She should even apply herself to do with greater care, things which are difficult, rather than those which are pleasant and easy. Because the satisfactions of self-love are not found there, she is certain of accomplishing only the will of God, and the sacrifice she makes of her own will is more glorious to God and more meritorious for herself. Her obedience should be careful, without limit or measure in regard to the things commanded; because there is nothing, either great or small, easy or repugnant, in which she should not obey, without lessening, in anything, the rigor of the command. She should be careful with regard to the persons who command; because there is none to whom she should not submit, officers or others whom superiors authorize to command her. She should be careful with regard to the place, for there is none, either secret or public, sacred or profane, where she should not obey; careful with regard to time, for there is none, either in sickness or health, affliction or consolation, in

which she should not execute the will of God. She should be careful with regard to her powers, because she should apply them all to what is commanded her ; her understanding, by a sincere approbation of the order ; her memory, by the most exact execution ; her will, by a generous application. Finally, she should be careful with regard to fervor ; because she should perform everything with affection, never finding anything too much, and always ready to do more.

She should obey faithfully, not contenting herself with doing things in part ; not forgetting or neglecting anything. Her obedience should be entire, not retrenching anything from the time allotted for it, or from the circumstances and conditions required. Self-love will always try to abstract something from what is God's, and to weaken the offering by doing only a part of what has been ordered.

She should obey without delay ; flying at the first sound of command, as she would at the voice of God. Her obedience should be so punctual, that at the first sound of the bell, she should leave a word unfinished. She should not wait for an absolute order, the mere inclination of the will of the superior, should suffice. She should imagine she hears what the prophet said to the people, before telling them the orders of God : " Behold, the Lord speaks to you ; behold what He says." This sentiment, elevating her soul, will give her more activity and celerity. The least delay would diminish her merit, and the reward of her docility. Were she in the most holy occupation, on her knees at the feet of Jesus Christ, in the most sublime contemplation, in the most intimate communication with Our Lord, or occupied in shedding torrents of tears over her sins, she must quit everything when there is question of obeying.

Again she must not reason upon the command, nor oppose anything to it. She should not be satisfied with obeying exteriorly, but closing her eyes upon her own lights, she should submit, blindly, to the will of superiors. She must show no repugnance, no pretexts of self-love, no aversions ; she must retrench her inclinations, reflections, and wishes, sacrifice her will, annihilate her caprice, subject

her humors. The orders of her superiors will, thereby, become sweeter. She will love them and obey with pleasure. What trouble we give ourselves, when we take the liberty of examining the orders given us! The examination gives rise to repugnance, and repugnance to revolt. To avoid this, she should obey, with the simplicity of a child, and leave to God the care of examining the views and intentions of the persons she obeys. If she sometimes has difficulties and representations to make, she sounds her heart, to see before God, if it be not her self-love, tepidity, pride, or humor that makes her represent the case. She has recourse to prayer, and asks of God light, to see if His glory will actuate her. This over, she proposes her reasons with the same sincerity, which she would use, if Jesus Christ were present; without passion or vivacity; with humility and modesty; purely to obey the divine inspiration. After exposing her reasons, she remains perfectly indifferent to what may be resolved upon. She submits, with respect, and is equally satisfied with yes, or no. She does not testify by a multiplicity of words, nor by a gloomy silence, that the decision gives her joy or pain.

By this frankness, our holy founder means that she should submit her judgment, and not permit herself any reflections that arise from nature and self-love, which must be subject in everything to obedience. She should never show exteriorly, nor permit interiorly any desire, fear, inclination, aversion, complacency, or repugnance. All occupations should be indifferent to her; all places equal. If she prefers any, they should be the lowest, because Jesus Christ has taught her, that they are the best. She should even reserve this preference in her private esteem, not to restrain the obedience that governs her. In fine, she should obey, without restraint, and sacrifice her reason to the pleasure of submitting. Hereby, she will give her superiors full liberty to order whatever they please, and she will free them from the trouble they would feel, when obliged to impose difficult commands. Our holy Father also requires that we submit to the will of our superiors, not through policy, complaisance, and human motives, such as to gain their favor, and lead them to

confide to us considerable employments, but through higher motives; to please God, to fulfil our obligation, and draw upon ourselves new graces.

Lastly, she must obey cordially; that is, she must love the command, and fulfil it with filial affection, being persuaded that it is the will of God she accomplishes in submitting to those, who hold His place. Obedience should be animated by charity. It has this in common with faith, which, without love, is but a dead body. The command should be received first, and principally, in the heart. The love of obedience is often worth more than the action itself. It effaces imperfections and negligences, and secures for eternity, what is done through its spirit. Nothing that is done by the impulse of obedience is lost for the future life. But that which is done without it, how excellent soever it may be, always runs a risk of losing part of its value. It is to be feared that self-love and self-will mingle in it, and the ordinary effect of self-will is to destroy good works, or their merit, and make them useless for salvation. The best that is done without the love of obedience is no longer pleasing to God. It is sacrificing to one's self. Love, on the contrary, renders meritorious actions which would be otherwise indifferent, and it renders more so, those which are already meritorious of themselves. Therefore, to eat, to sleep, to recreate, are meritorious actions, when willingly done, in the time, and with the circumstances prescribed by obedience. To pray, to sing the praises of God, to mortify and humble one's self are actions rendered more meritorious by the love of obedience, than by the hatred of self and the spirit of penance which inspires them. How many occasions, then, has a religious of accumulating merits, and how much she is to be pitied, who, having so easy a means of amassing immense treasures, loses them through unwillingness to subject herself!

St. Chantal often said to her daughters; "persevere, in obedience." "It is the particular virtue of religion, and will maintain it, in its integrity." She made more account of obedience, than of any other virtue. In her ardent desire for our perfection, she recommended nothing more than docility. "Distrust," said she, "every thing in you,

that weakens the love and esteem of submission. Obey kindly, without inquiring or examining why, or how they command; seek no other reason than that of obedience, which has thus ordered it. You may be mistaken in the good you wish to do, but in obedience, you are sure of acting according to the designs of God over you. Even in doubtful cases upon the law of God, and that of the Church; when, for example, you doubt that you need to be dispensed from the abstinence prescribed by the Church, or by your Rules, the authority of your superior should reassure you. In doing what she tells you, you are certain not to err. "I would rather," said she, "see a sister take some relief through obedience, than deprive herself of it through a want of submission." "Walk, therefore," says St. Francis of Sales, "in the simplicity of obedience. It is a sure means of overcoming your spiritual enemies, and of offering to our Lord, many holy victories, that will delight His heart, and draw upon you wonderful effects of His grace. Preserve, always, as the apple of your eye, the respect, confidence, and holy frankness towards your superiors in view of God alone. Blessed are those who practice devoutly and simply this article, which teaches a part of the spiritual infancy which our Lord has so much recommended." And he adds, "this advice is of such great importance to maintain the spirit of the institute in its perfection, that, when it will be wanting, the spirit will fail, but if preserved, it will fill heaven with souls." What a declaration! Was it a prophecy or a threat! It is a saint who speaks, and who does it according to the spirit of God.

What have I not to reproach myself with, O my God! How have I practised obedience until now? How many of my actions have I withdrawn from it? How many have I performed without the regulation of obedience, and omitted those prescribed me without permission, or postponed to another time? And when I have practised obedience, what reasonings, delays, and human motives, weakened, or destroyed all its virtue? Is this, O my God, to live under obedience; and yet I have made the vow? What can I do, Lord, to repair so many faults? I come to the foot of Thy cross, to again sacrifice and immolate this will

which it costs so much to submit. I ratify, and reiterate to-day the vow I made at my profession, to see Thee in my superiors, and to obey them as Thee; my will shall be forever forgotten and sunk in Thine, O, my adorable Spouse! Happy obedience! which breaks shameful and criminal chains, to give me those of glory and innocence, under which I find the true liberty of the children of God.

I will, then, obey Thee, O my God! with all the simplicity and docility of a child. I will no longer reason on what will be ordered me. I will not permit myself to examine the orders of those who have the right to command me, or the motives of their actions. I will never testify my inclinations through any human sentiment to lead them to order me one thing rather than another. I will undertake nothing of myself. I will desire nothing, ask nothing, seek nothing, refuse nothing; I will conform to, and follow all their intentions; I will enter into their views; will act only by their orders; move only by their impulse. Do thou, Lord, regulate, reform, overcome, or entirely destroy my rebellious will; dry up the fatal source of my revolts; preserve me from all the returns of my self-love; direct my steps, O my God, and I will obey Thee unto death.

SIXTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.—ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

First Point.

“FOR to know Thee is perfect justice; and to know Thy justice and Thy power is the root of immortality.”—Wisdom, xv., 3.

“He who does not know Jesus Christ,” says St. Francis of Sales, “cannot hope for salvation. First, because the Scripture teaches us that eternal life consists in knowing God and His Son Jesus Christ; secondly, because reason itself tells us that we cannot love Him Whom we do not know, or possess Him Whom we do not love.”

In fact, the will is a blind power and incapable of loving

an unknown object. It is necessary that the understanding discover its goodness. The will cannot, therefore, love Jesus Christ very ardently, unless it knows very perfectly His infinite greatness. This is, without doubt, the reason that so few love Jesus Christ; they do not know Him sufficiently to be attracted to Him. On the contrary, the blessed love Him with all their strength and with inconceivable transports, because they know Him perfectly, and see Him unveiled as He is in Himself. Now, the love of Jesus Christ is necessary for eternal life, and we must conclude the same thing of His knowledge, since it is the principle of this love, and, as St. Chantal says, "the source of eternal life."

If all men are obliged to acquire this knowledge, how much more should a religious cultivate it! She is consecrated to Jesus Christ, and should serve Him in a more excellent manner, leading others to love and serve Him. She should avoid sin and perform her actions in a holy manner. She should rise to eminent contemplation and sanctity, leading a life wholly divine. Now, how can she fulfil all these obligations without a knowledge of Jesus Christ? He, alone, it is, who can enlighten her, and inflame her to accomplish her sacrifice, to glorify and serve her divine Spouse, to kindle His love in the heart of her neighbor, to repulse the attacks of the demon, to perfect her good works, to contemplate divine things, in fine, to conform her life to that of her divine Model. Can she acquit herself of these different duties, without that holy light, which enlightens the mind and animates the will, that is to say, without this knowledge of Jesus Christ, which is a science, not purely human and speculative, but affective and instructive, leading to the practice of all that is necessary to acquire sanctity? Ah! a religious, ignorant of Jesus Christ, is ignorant of her state, which is founded on the intimate and essential conformity she should have with Him.

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John xiv., 6.), says our divine Saviour, that is: Whither do you wish to go? I point out the way. What do you wish to believe? I am the Truth. Do you wish to live? I preserve life. Not to apply ourselves to know our Lord is exposing

ourselves to go astray, as He alone is the Way. It is risking oneself or one's belief, since He, alone, is the Truth. It is finding death instead of life, since, by Jesus Christ, alone, we live in God.

From these principles, it follows that the shortest, surest, and most necessary means to attain perfection and make rapid progress therein is the knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is the most necessary means, because nothing discovers better to the soul what God is in Himself, His greatness, sanctity, and majesty, for, Jesus Christ being the living expression of the Father, whoever knows the Son, knows, also, the Father. Nothing can give her more lively faith, or deeper respect for the mysteries of salvation than to know Him Who is their principle, centre, and term. Nothing can show more clearly the malice of sin than what Jesus has done to repair it.

This knowledge is the surest way to perfection, because we find every thing in Jesus Christ, and our divine Saviour, far from abandoning those who call upon Him, even seeks those who avoid Him. How can a soul apply herself to know Him and not be touched by all He has done for her? the love with which He has loved and still loves her? How can she study His divine Heart and not expect every thing from it? How can she place her confidence in Him and perish?

Finally, this knowledge is the shortest means of acquiring sanctity. By collecting a multiplicity of views in one single object, the attention becomes stronger, the practice easier, and the assistance more certain. The human mind is so limited that it cannot be applied to a multiplicity, without weakening its application. Therefore, a single object, which comprises all perfections, fixes and fortifies the attention. For the same reason, a single practice renders us more able to embrace it and be faithful to it. It will be less fatiguing than if we proposed to ourselves, in detail, all that is necessary for our salvation. It is certain that the assistance we derive from the source of all good is more efficacious than all we find elsewhere.

To be perfect, it suffices for a religious to live in a continual contemplation of the goodness and beauty of God. Penance, continual renunciation, the fear of God's

judgments, are, without doubt, necessary to salvation. Yet these virtues have no strength or value in the eyes of God, but inasmuch as they are seen, meditated, and practised in Jesus Christ.

The necessity of penance is deeply impressed on her heart, as often as she attentively considers what Jesus has done for the expiation of her sins, the grief He underwent for them in the Garden of Olives, and His bloody death to repair them. She will learn renunciation from Jesus in His crib, in His flight into Egypt, in His silence under calumnies, reproach, and suffering. The Eternal Word will penetrate her with fear of God's judgments, when He warns her, that He will come as a thief in the night when she least expects Him, and when He tells her to walk during the light, lest the darkness overcome and prevent her.

From this knowledge of Jesus Christ, comes the most perfect confidence; for, can a religious, who knows what Jesus Christ is in her regard, distrust Him? Jesus is the Son of the eternal Father, in every thing equal to Him, and, at the same time, He is her Redeemer; can she doubt His power? He is her head; therefore, it is through Him, alone, that she can exist. He is her mediator; and through Him, alone, can she find grace and favor. He is her Saviour and her victim; by Him, alone, can she pay her debts to the divine justice. He says to her: "I am come, not to seek the just, but sinners." What has she not to fear, when not sustained by this good Saviour? If she sincerely desires to be converted, let her address herself to Jesus Christ, let her ingenuously confess to Him all her faults, all the opposition that she feels to good. In everything and everywhere, let Jesus Christ be always the first to whom she has recourse. In her pains and temptations, let her represent to herself that Jesus Christ is the witness of them, and she will triumph over them. In her doubts, let her consult her divine Saviour, and she will receive light. Jesus cannot refuse assistance to one who asks it with confidence. He only seeks to communicate Himself, but most frequently He finds all hearts closed against Him. Whence comes this misfortune? From the little knowledge and remembrance souls have of Him.

They persist in wishing to know the true good by themselves. They are lost in a barren theory, in vain speculations, which flatter self-love and change not the heart. But if they sincerely sought Jesus, if they studied Him, if they consulted Him, Who, alone, can communicate the true light, what progress would they not make in the way of salvation and perfection ! The knowledge of this Man-God and His light would lead a religious to take Him for the model of her conduct. She would endeavor to trace, in herself, the features she so admires in her Spouse, at least as far as her weakness would permit. From her awaking until her going to rest, she would direct all her actions by those of her divine Lord. By examining simply, and without effort, how He performed the action she is about to commence, she would soon learn the manner of doing it purely, and perfectly. His life would furnish her with examples for all the different states and circumstances, in which she might be. In temptations, her divine Saviour would remind her that persevering prayer and mortification are necessary to come off victorious. In contradictions, His example would teach her that she should return good for evil, that she should not stop at secondary causes, but consider the Will of her heavenly Father to permit what she experiences, in order to expiate her sins and purify her virtues. She will be induced to keep silence in imitation of Him, without allowing herself either complaint or murmur. His profound humility will warn her to flee from praises, or applauses, and refer the glory of all to her God. In sufferings, He will tell her that it was necessary that Jesus Christ should suffer, to enter into His glory and open heaven for her. He will trace out the formula of her submission : "Father, not My Will. but Thine be done !" In her humiliations, He will remind her that the angels lost heaven through pride, and are now in hell ; that man, having through pride, wished to know good and evil, was driven out of paradise ; that having been redeemed by the death of a God, she can enter heaven only by humility, which is the way, He has traced out for His own. If sometimes Heaven seems to refuse to listen to her, if her God shows Himself to her armed with a sword, she will be strengthened

by the example of Jesus Christ, Who, upon the cross, cried out: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And by these words: "Father, into Thy Hands, I commend My spirit," He will teach her that the more she experiences an apparent abandonment on the part of this God of mercy, the more she should abandon herself to Him, saying with her divine Model: "My God, I confide my spirit, and all my disquietudes into Thy paternal heart." Finally, by the knowledge of Jesus Christ, she will be animated to retrace in her conduct all the virtues of this God made man, His charity, patience, kindness to little ones, compassion towards the sick and afflicted. Every thing in Him should be instructive for her, His poor, penitent, laborious and dependent life, His wounds, tears, sorrows and opprobriums. In a word, she should apply herself to conform all her life to that of her Saviour, and to render herself worthy of being His. The natural inconstancy of her mind and heart, so fatal to perfection, should be fixed by the knowledge and study of Jesus Christ. "Come and see," said the apostle Philip, "come and see Him, Whom to see is to love." "Can a religious soul," says St. Francis of Sales, "who has applied herself with fervor to the study of Jesus Christ, who has placed all her confidence in him, ever turn away her mind and heart from so precious a treasure?" "No," answers St. Chantal, "she who loves Jesus Christ, and solicits His grace and holy perseverance, cannot abandon Him through levity, or lose sight of Him for a moment."

Second Point.

Couldst Thou not, O my Saviour, make to me the reproach Thou didst formerly make to one of Thy apostles? and do I not deserve it more than he? "What, am I so long in the midst of you and yet you know Me not?" Although I have professed to love Thee, O my God, do I even know Thee? Have I ever applied myself to this study, of which St. Paul knew so well the necessity and importance, when he declared that he wished to know one thing only, Thee, O my Jesus, and Thy cross?

Thy goodness made Thee descend from the throne of

Thy glory to become my Model, and I have not contemplated Thee! I have been occupied with vain and frivolous things, whilst I could have meditated on Thy divine perfections. I heard the voice of the heavenly Father, which said to me: "This is My beloved Son. . . . hear ye Him," and I avoided Thy divine presence, I neglected to learn Thy precious lessons. I exist only through Thee, O Word, by Whom all things have been made. Thou art the divine Model I should follow; I shall be judged by my conformity with Thee, and scarcely do I know Thee. "I know Thee according to the flesh," as St. Paul says, "but not according to the spirit." I know that Thou hast appeared upon earth. Thy name is known to me, as also the history of some of Thy mysteries, but have I well meditated upon them? I possess that knowledge of Thee, which is not a saving one, but have I that, which gives merit to actions, which unites to Thee by the sentiments of the heart, by esteem and, still more, by a love for Thy maxims? This favor is in Thy hands, O Lord, Thou givest this knowledge according to Thy good pleasure. Do not refuse it to me. I ask Thee with the most lively earnestness to teach me to know Thee and to love Thee.

How can I increase in Thy love, as my state requires, and practice the virtues so opposed to my natural inclinations, if I do not contemplate them in Thee? In vain would I labor profitably at the acquisition of sanctity, if I do not learn it of Thee, Who art its perfect model. Thou art the real source of all virtues; it is from Thee that the saints have drawn those which they have practised. These virtues have been virtues in the saints, only because Thou hast ennobled and consecrated them in Thy person: It is, then, in Thee alone that we should seek what they have taught us. I will even imitate the eminent perfections of my holy founders, only because of their accordance with Thine. In honoring them, it is less them that I honor than Thee, whose traits they have expressed in their conduct. Thou hast manifested their glory, Oh my God! Thou hast given to their actions a splendor and brilliancy, which inspire me with sentiments of respect and veneration for them. But, after all, they have shone in the Church like those stars, that appear in the firma-

ment, only when the sun has disappeared, whose splendor is borrowed only from Thee, Who art the light of the world. What is the most eminent sanctity compared to Thine? A truly spiritual man of the last century, said: "Let them entertain me as much as they will on the virtues of the saints, let them recount their miracles, they will but weary me, if, at the same time, they do not speak to me of their conformity with Jesus Christ, the inexhaustible source of all justice." "I only wish," added he, with the Apostle, "and I say to Thee, O divine Saviour, with both, I only wish to find Thee in all things, I wish for Thee only, and that Thou alone be all in all to me!" "Yes," I will add with St. Bernard, attracted by the sublime knowledge of Thy perfections, and, as it were, inebriated with the study of Thy sanctity, "let the learned doctors, who teach the most perfect routes, and explain the most hidden mysteries of the mystical life, be silent: I wish no other master than Thou, Oh Jesus; I wish to listen to no voice but Thine; I no longer wish to hear Moses, who has a stammering tongue; the lips of Isaias are not sufficiently pure; Jeremias is a child, who knows not how to speak; the prophets have ceased prophesying; but do Thou alone speak, Oh my God, of Whom they have told so many wonders! It is in listening to Thee, in meditating on Thy words and examples, that I will learn to place all my confidence in our common Father, and that, without fear of presumption, I can give Him that tender name of which He is so jealous, that He forbids us to give it to anyone on earth. It is in listening to Thee, and in meditating on Thy life, that I will acquire more distinct, more noble and more consoling knowledge of Thy greatness and goodness, as Thou dost say: 'If you had known Me, you would, without doubt, have known My Father also.' (John xiv., 7). To elevate myself to Thy divinity, I will meditate on Thy holy humanity; I will seek to unite myself to Thee as God, by seeking to imitate Thee as man. Perhaps it would be dangerous for me to rise so high and to aspire to such great favors, but an Apostle desired it, he asked of Thee the grace to see and know Thy Father: 'Philip said: Lord, show us the Father.' (John xiv., 8)."

Thus, shall I apply myself to study Thee. To know Thee is to know all. Thus will I be transformed, little by little, as St. Paul says, into Thy image, by passing from light to light. Elevating myself by degrees, I will be filled with Thy light and maxims. I will love all that Thou hast done, and respect all that Thou hast said. Thou wilt appear to me, as the Scripture says, "full of grace and truth." From constantly picturing Thy image to my mind, it will be so deeply engraven in my heart, that it will produce those admirable fruits, which, according to Thy promise, they gather, who attach themselves to Thee, and these fruits are to become conformed to Thee by the imitation of Thy virtues.

Precious knowledge of Jesus Christ! Sublime study! You have brought the first christians to the highest sanctity; the greatest saints have made your practice a law. St. Francis of Assisium retired every hour into Thy wounds, O my divine Saviour! St. Anthony of Padua occupied himself only with Thy infancy; St. Bernard spoke only of Thy mysteries; St. Charles Borromeo meditated all his life upon Thy Passion; St. Teresa applied herself, especially, to consider the immense riches contained in Thy holy humanity. It is only necessary to go through the works of St. Francis of Sales, to remark that Thou, alone, as God made man, wast the most tender object of his love, and the ordinary subject of his thoughts. St. Chantal, after his example, sought to penetrate the depths of Thy actions, only after having studied them in the exterior; she elevated herself to Thy divinity only by meditation on Thy holy humanity. This is the way that has led all great souls to the most consummate perfection; thus, O my divine Saviour, should I increase, according to the advice of St. Paul, in all virtues, by the study of Thy greatness and mysteries, and by keeping my eyes fixed on Thee, Who art the "Author and Perfecter" of my faith. How much time I have lost in giving myself to other studies, as dry as they are sterile; and neglecting that of Thy sacred person, seeking to slake my thirst at a rivulet, in place of drawing from the source itself; in going through books which trace out the paths of perfection, instead of studying them in Thee, Who art the most excellent guide, and the

most accomplished model. O Jesus! Thou shalt, henceforth, be the only object of my contemplation. I wish to forget all, and to know but Thee alone. My heart is drawn by the attraction of this true, divine, and supereminent science. But this attraction is Thy work, the effect of Thy mercy; what will become of it, O my God, if Thou dost not perfect it? Enlighten me, then, with Thy divine light. Show Thyself to me, through the mystic cloud of faith. May I apply myself more to meditate on Thy divine examples, and regulate my actions by Thine; permit me no longer to act but with Thee, by Thee, and for Thee. Ah! if the children of the world ignore the inestimable gift they possess; if Thou art in the midst of them, and they know Thee not; if Thou canst make the same reproach to them which Thou didst make to the Jews, that they know neither Thy father nor Thee, it will be my duty to make good an indifference which is injurious to Thee. The more they labor to despise and destroy Thy empire, the more zeal I will show to acknowledge and re-establish it; the more Thy sacred image is disfigured, the more I will imprint it on my life by the most characteristic traits. May I study Thee carefully and unceasingly; may this study lead me to the imitation of Thy virtues; may this imitation bring me to Thy love, this love to the most perfect union with Thee, and this union to the enjoyment of Thy glory in eternity.

SIXTH DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.—ON THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST,
OUR MODEL.

First Point.

“BE ye, therefore, followers of God, as most dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.”—Ephesians v.

After having studied to know Jesus Christ, a religious should think of perfecting herself in His love. As a Spouse of Jesus Christ, she is called to a closer union with Him.

The children of wisdom, says the holy scripture, should be distinguished by love. "Each one has his art and profession," says St. Francis of Sales, "and the art and profession of a religious is to love Jesus Christ." She is obliged to pass her life in the practice of religious virtues and solid piety. Her function is to render, continually, to the Lord the worship and service that are due to Him. "Now, all the religion, all the solid piety, all the worship and service which she can render to God," says St. Chantal following the idea of St. Augustine, "consists in love." Jesus Christ came to bring upon earth that sacred fire of His divine love. But as it cannot live in the world, where the waters of iniquity and corruption inundate everything, He has hidden it in the cloisters, and obliged their inmates to keep it alive. Woe, then, to those religious houses, in which this divine fire, like that of the temple, has, for want of care in feeding it, been extinguished.

The means of strengthening the love of God is to place as a foundation the love of Jesus Christ, His only and beloved Son, and the object of His complacency. St. Paul said, that nothing would ever weaken, in his heart, the love of the Father, because its foundation was the love of the Son. He daily prayed that the sacred humanity of Christ might reign in all hearts.

What, in fact, is more reasonable than to love Him who has manifested the *power* of God in His miracles, the *wisdom* of God in His law, the *perfection* of God in His manners, the *light* of God in His words, the *patience* of God in His sufferings? What more just than to love Him who bears all the titles that demand her love? Him, Who in quality of Father, Pastor, Brother, Master, King, Head, Spouse, Friend, and Saviour did not form a desire, or perform an act, in the whole course of His mortal life, that was not a new proof of His predilection for her? Him, Who has loved her in some manner more than Himself, since He sacrificed for her His repose, His glory and felicity, His body and blood, and His life? What could He give her more than His own divine Person? What more could He suffer for her than the death of the Cross? It was, however, too little for His love. Not contented to give Himself,

and to suffer on Calvary, His charity led Him to find the secret of giving Himself, at the same time, and every day in the Holy Eucharist, where He not only offers Himself to His Father for her, but where He still gives Himself to her in holy Communion; where He sheds His blood into her heart, and applies to her its virtue and merit. But if all these miracles, wrought in her favor, lose something of their value in her estimation, because they are common to her with all men, shall she not devote all her love to Him Who has watched over her, with His benedictions, chosen her, because He willed it; and Who, from the womb of her mother, as says the Scripture, placed His hand upon her, as upon a victim belonging to Him, and which He reserves entirely to Himself?

Our divine Saviour, through no other motive than His mercy, has preferred her to so many souls, whom He leaves to perish in the world. He cast upon her that powerful look, which withdrew her from it. He broke the bonds which kept her there; He conducted her to this holy place; He opened to her the gates of Sion, and fixed her in His sanctuary, among the faithful virgins, who serve Him, and in the midst of the most abundant succors, which He lavished upon her. After all this excess of charity, would it not be inconceivable, that He would be obliged to employ authority and command, and even threats of hell-fire, to kindle in a religious soul the fire of heaven, the flames of His love? "Would it not be still more horrible," says St. Francis of Sales, "that this hard, and unfeeling heart should be found among the daughters of the Visitation, whose only joy should be centred in Jesus Christ; whose only delight should be to think of Him, their life, and sovereign desire."

Should not the charity of this divine Saviour animate the soul of a true religious? All that can distract, or separate her from her love should be a burden to her. A true lover of Jesus Christ aspires only to approach nearer to Him, to form with Him but one same unity of sentiment. She seeks only to please Him, to be faithful to her least obligations. Her only fear is to rob Him of some part of the holocaust, by the smallest attachment, or the least reserve. Her desire is that all should love Him.

She would wish to compensate, by the ardor of her love, for the coldness and indifference of all others. She incessantly reanimates herself by holy aspirations and inflamed sighs, divesting herself of all self-seeking, to consider only her Beloved. Such is, in a religious soul, true love for Jesus Christ. Animated by the divine flame, she is disposed to lose every thing, rather than lose His grace. She sacrifices to Him the slightest complacencies of her vanity, the superfluous gratifications, which only serve to flatter her senses, or to make her forget Him; even the success of her labors, she sacrifices to Him. In her interior, sufferings, sadness, weariness, fear, repugnances, aridities, dryness, disgust, and languor; in her exterior, contempt, humiliations, railleries, accusations, infirmities, maladies, death itself. She prefers the Will of God to her own; she immolates every thing to Him. What would she not do to increase in her this divine love? Persuaded that she will have, in heaven, for all eternity, only the measure of love that she shall have acquired on earth; that death will only fix her forever in the degree she shall have attained at the moment of the separation of her soul from her body, just as it will only fire the wicked in the degree of malice, in which they shall be at the last moment.

Thus acts the religious, who is exercised in the love of Jesus. What a motive for trying to increase daily and hourly in this love! Ah! what delights does she not find in it! But, to taste this hidden manna, a soul must be entirely dead to herself. She must look with contempt, and even with horror upon every consolation, but that of loving Jesus Christ. We reach love only through death, and we can procure the sweetness of one only by the bitterness of the other; we cannot share the favors of Jesus Christ, while we seek those of creatures. In fine, we cannot enjoy the delights of the spirit, except by renouncing the satisfactions of the senses. This evangelical death, this holy hatred of self, this continual renunciation of our natural inclinations, this love of crosses and humiliations, may at first alarm those, who are beginning to walk in the way of perfection, but the love of Jesus, which is their end, will, itself, become the way, if they are faithful to it. This love, so imperfect in the commencement, will inspire

them with a certain sensible fervor, which will smoothe their difficulties, and induce them to practice those virtues, so contrary to the passions, so hard to the senses, so elevated above reason, and in which, however, religious perfection consists. It will at first, accustom them to look without fear, and, then, with affection, upon those virtues which Jesus Christ has so much loved; of which He has given them such great examples, and which, therefore, will become amiable to them. Thence will arise in them a desire of becoming like what they love. Can we truly love, and not ardently wish to resemble what we cherish? Thus, the true lover of Jesus is led, as it were, necessarily to love and embrace what He loved, esteemed, and embraced, that is,—sufferings and humiliations. Thus, the love of Jesus in the soul brings forth all sanctity. “And this love,” says St. Francis of Sales, “will complete her perfection, because it is the end of the religious vows.” Without it, all the rest is useless. Love is the oil, that was wanting to the foolish virgins of the Gospel, and this holy prelate applied himself, during his whole life, to fill his soul, to penetrate his heart with this sacred love, which he inspired by his words and writings. His conversations and his thoughts, all his views and intentions, sentiments, and affections, spirit and conduct,—every thing in him was animated with the love of Jesus Christ. His sweetest entertainments were with this divine Saviour; his most ordinary thoughts were of Him, his most indifferent actions were offered to Him; he made this divine Lord the object of all his love, tenderness, intentions, sacrifices,—of his whole life. The last motion of his heart was but the last effort of his love, which made him pass from earth to heaven, and placed him in the happy necessity of loving Jesus Christ, not only constantly, but for all eternity.

Who walked more faithfully in his footsteps than his true daughter St. Chantal? Who ever lived a life more hidden in the love of Jesus Christ? This divine Saviour, according to the testimony of the holy prelate, was her only love, her only pleasure, and her only end. Intimately united to this Beloved of her heart, she referred to Him all her actions. He, alone, was the principle, the centre, the term, and the only witness of them. She did literally for

Him, her cherished Spouse, what the divine Spouse in the Canticles asked of her, and she imprinted his seal so deeply on her heart, that she was incessantly reminded of Him, His greatness, and His love. She desired only to live and die, under the impress and seal of love.

Second Point.

O Jesus! Who, to captivate my heart, hast united all that is amiable in God and man, according to nature and grace, how have I hitherto loved Thee? O most amiable and faithful of Spouses, how have I corresponded to Thy predilection? After so much indifference and ingratitude, so many offences, Thou still deignest to stretch out Thine arms to me, to open to me Thy heart, and to ask for mine. Ah! this heart returns to Thee; fill it with Thy divine love, and let it never more wander from Thee. I am confused at having so imperfectly loved Thee, and outraged Thee so sensibly, and I now sincerely desire to love Thee, henceforth, unreservedly. Grant, O my Jesus, that for the future, my whole conduct may be animated by Thy love.

From all eternity, Thou hast loved me with infinite tenderness, and thus Thou still lovest me. Ah! should not infinite tenderness have infinite power over the heart of its object? This is enough, the only measure my love for Thee shall have is to be without measure. I was created by Thy love which, alone, made Thee think of me when I was nothing. I was created for Thy love, for the end of the law, and of my state is charity. O happy fate! As a religious, I am all Thine, and Thou art all mine, therefore, a mutual and eternal love should unite us both. O glorious fate! Thou, O Jesus, hast purchased me entirely, my mind with all its thoughts, my heart with all its affections, my soul with all its faculties, my body with all its senses and powers, my life with all its movements. Thou hast purchased me at the price of Thy blood, and all Thy blood. Thou hast given me Thyself entirely, to possess me entirely. Thou hast purchased me, that I may live no longer for myself, but for Thee. Therefore, O Jesus, I will live only to love Thee, I will love nothing but Thee, or, at least, nothing but for Thee.

How worthy of my love is the history of Thy mercies to my soul! What magnificence in Thy benefits! Not content with having, in the eternal counsels, preferred me to an infinity of souls, who follow the path of perdition, Thou hast chosen me to be of the small number of just and faithful souls, who, in the midst of the world, live by faith. Thou hast, by special favor, distinguished me from them; Thou hast chosen me, among Thy elect, to consecrate me entirely to Thy name and glory. What prodigies has not Thy love worked! What means has not Thy wisdom employed to pave the way in which Thou wouldst conduct me? What secret invitations! What repeated solicitations! What clouds scattered! What disgusts overcome! What obstacles removed! What facilities prepared! What unexpected events! What revolutions! Once placed in the secret of Thy sanctuary, what protection, assistance, and special graces, hast Thou not, unceasingly, lavished on me! What shall I render Thee, O Jesus, for all Thy favors? Why cannot I praise Thee in a manner suited to Thy benefits? O that I had a thousand minds and lives, or rather the minds and lives of all men to adore and love Thee! O that I could unite in myself all the love and homage of the blessed in heaven! O that I could burn with the sacred flames that consume Thy blessed Mother! But the hearts of men and angels are too narrow to love Thee as much as Thou deservest. Why I cannot love Thee more than I do seems strange and incredible. O that I could love Thee with that infinite love, which Thy eternal Father and the Holy Spirit have for Thee! My heart is not capable of this love for Thee, my Jesus, but at least my desire to love Thee will be as ardent, continual, immense, and immortal as my soul; I will never cease calling on heaven and earth to love Thee for me; I will, everywhere, seek to supply for my indigence and incapacity. This ardor of love will unceasingly occupy my heart and nothing will impede its desires.

But, Lord, to whose desires dost Thou listen? To the desires of those only who, not being able to love Thee as much as they wish, love Thee as much as they can; who refuse no sacrifice that Thou dost ask; and who, docile to the inspirations of Thy grace, are moved only by its

impulse. Thou dost reject, on the contrary, the sterile and hypocritical desires of a heart that sighs after Thy love, and who, when occasions offer, refuses to give Thee proofs of it. Thou abhorrest languid, tepid, and inactive desires, that aspire not to divine sanctity. I will prove mine, O divine Saviour, by my works; I shall love Thee, not with a love limited to words alone, or to the sentiments of the heart, or even to the conviction of the mind, that Thou art infinitely amiable, but with that generous love of the whole being, that proves itself by actions. Far from me be reserve, inconstancy, and self-interest.

There shall be no division; I consecrate and sacrifice anew to Thee my whole heart, that is my life, of which my heart is the source, all its sentiments, tenderness, desires, and satisfactions; my mind, that is all my thoughts, judgments, projects, and designs; my soul, that is all my passions without exception; finally, my whole strength, all my actions, labors, and undertakings.

There shall be no inconstancy; my love shall be unbroken, and fill every moment of my life. Neither time, nor the most severe trials will ever lessen it or make it waver.

There shall be no self-interest; I shall love Thee, my neighbor, and myself for love of Thee. Thou dost not ask me to carry disinterestedness so far as to sacrifice the goods of grace and glory; true charity does not rob us of the hope of eternal happiness, but perfects it by making love its heart and soul. I shall then hope for heaven, but only in order to love Thee more perfectly, and without fear of losing my precious treasure. I shall fear hell, but only on account of the privation of Thy love. This pure love of my heart shall not be distracted by false joys, seduced by pleasure, dazzled by earthly greatness, cast down by afflictions, repulsed by labor, or shaken by temptation. Although without feeling or consolation, it will never falter. It will consent generously to privation, and, in the midst of the most severe trials, it will redouble its protestations and acts. It will, unceasingly, dart towards Thee, O Lord, through the obscure paths of faith, as if it beheld Thee without veil. In a word, I shall love Thee for Thyself alone, and if I cannot, shrouded as I am in the senses,

separate my interests from Thy love, I shall always lead them to Thy love. My heart will strive to burn for Thee, as Thine burns for me. Thou art, says Holy Scripture, a God of fire, and a fire that consumes all; thus do I wish to be on fire for Thy glory and interests, the defence of Thy laws, and the accomplishment of the duties of my state. A fire shut up is soon smothered. Thus love cannot be concentrated, but seeks to show itself; everything, even its silence, speaks; everything, even the care it takes to conceal itself, betrays it. Can I, then, fail to make known that I love Thee and Thee alone? that I belong to Thee, that I wish for Thee, and that I have no feeling but for Thee? Love is not idle, else it is not love. Mine shall then be active, and ardent in action. I shall sustain it by fidelity to my rules, submission to Thy will, obedience to the priests of Thy Church, and the directors of my soul. I shall foster it by the holy communication of prayer, and Thy holy presence. In that divine presence, can I ever become weary or dissipated? disgusted with Thee, Who art the felicity of the angels, and the joy of the elect? Can I love Thee and find Thy service painful? or even not love the pain, by which I can prove to Thee my tenderness?

Love is, in some sort, all-powerful nothing stops it, and difficulties vanish before it. Therefore, there is no human respect, raillery, satire, persecution, or contempt, no crosses or sufferings, from which I shall shrink; no sacrifice that I shall not make; no obstacles that I shall not overcome. In success or failure, esteem or contempt, consolations or desolations, health or sickness, life or death,—in all, I shall love Thee. I shall, unceasingly, sacrifice to Thee my natural sentiments; I shall consecrate to Thee all that belongs to me; I shall, in every thing, accomplish Thy holy will, and my least actions shall be animated by purity of intention, in order to make them pleasing to Thee. I shall love nothing with Thee that I shall not love for Thee, or rather, I shall really love nothing but Thee, and shall love Thee in all that I love, so that Thou shalt be unceasingly the source and the direct object of my love. All I shall ask of Thee is to love Thee, and as a reward of my love, I only ask to love Thee

more. At all times, every day and moment, in all places, in every thought, word, and action, Thou wilt be always present, always sovereignly amiable. As the crime of my life, or rather the principle of all the crimes of my life, has been to seek self in everything, to refer and turn every thing to self, because I loved self and self alone; henceforth, Thou shalt take the place of self, establishing Thy love on the ruins and destruction of my self-love. In every thing, everywhere, and always, I will seek but Thee, because I love but Thee, and all else in Thee and for Thee. Animated by thy love, all will speak to me of Thee, all will lead me to Thee, all will make me Thine.

Incarnate Word, victim of love, enkindle in my heart that sacred fire which immolated Thee for me; may it consume me for Thee, as it consumed Thee for my salvation! May it purify my affections, stay my inconstancy, regulate and sanctify all my movements! May it animate all in me, mind, heart and action; may my words be words of fire; my thoughts so many ardent flames; my desires so many inflamed sighs! May this heavenly fire be my food, the soul of my soul, the life of my life. May I spread and enkindle it everywhere, that everywhere Thou mayest be loved, that all may know there is no evil, save that of not loving Thee. May I live of Thy love, expire in Thy love, and gain all the treasures of Thy love.

SIXTH DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION.—ON UNION WITH JESUS CHRIST.

“If anyone remaineth not in Me, he shall be cast forth as a branch and shall wither, and they shall gather him up and cast him into the fire; and he burneth. . . . He that abideth in Me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit.”—John xv., 5, 6.

As the branch separated from the vine and deprived of the sap which fertilized it becomes unfruitful and fit only to be burned, so the religious soul, separated from Jesus Christ, falls by degrees from abyss to abyss, from inaction into languor, from languor into sterility, from sterility into

dryness, from dryness into hell. She, on the contrary, who dwells in Jesus Christ, bears in Him and for Him fruits of life and sanctity. Closely united to Him, all her strength and beauty are within, that is, in the sanctuary of her heart, where her God dwells. There is the treasure which attracts her, the divine object which charms her. There, alone with Jesus, she is happy and contented. She listens to Him attentively, and daily discovers in Him new beauties, new perfections. Jesus Christ dwells in her, He acts in her, and communicates to her His life. What a glorious advantage! What an abundance of benefits are contained in this holy union of the religious soul with Jesus Christ! It makes her enjoy so great a familiarity with her divine Spouse, that no friends converse together more frequently, more tenderly, or with more facility, frankness, and openness of heart. It procures her a wonderful liberty of spirit, that raises her above all the events of life, and frees her from the tyranny of human respect. It gives her a supernatural strength to perform all her actions in a holy manner, and acquit herself worthily of all her employments. It gives her a divine prudence to conduct herself in all her enterprises, a perfect peace and tranquility in all matters, in fine, a continual victory over herself and her passions. Such is the happy condition to which a Religious of the Visitation is especially called. "Her life," says St. Francis of Sales, "should be so hidden with Jesus Christ in God, that she should no longer live for herself, but for Him Who has acquired her life by His death. Her heart should have no movement, but to tend to unite itself closely with that of Jesus." "Her principal care," says St. Chantal, "should be to live in the closest union with Jesus Christ, that this perpetual union may serve to regulate, not only her mind and heart, but her whole exterior. O Jesus! if a religious understood the happiness of a soul that is united to Thee, that applies herself only to love Thee, to give Thee proofs of her love, to receive testimonies of Thine, she would not dread the application and vigilance which such a union requires. Ah! that I could say to every living creature in the universe: 'If you wish to be happy, if you wish to be

perfect, unite yourself to Jesus Christ!’ ” This union will change your weakness into strength, your pusillanimity into courage, your darkness into light, your tepidity into love ; this love will make you retrench all that is not compatible with the union of heart you have contracted with Him. You will then resist pride, sloth, self-love, impatience, resentment, and all disorderly affections ; you will feel that these cannot be united to the actions of a God, Who is humble, annihilated, poor, patient, meek, compassionate, and zealous for the glory of His Father. The desire to make this union more intimate will be for you a powerful motive to exercise yourself in all virtues and to practice them in the most perfect manner.

Was there ever a motive more worthy of a religious than the desire of being united with her God? Blessed is she who, in everything, and everywhere, sees and hears Jesus only ! Who makes use of what distracts a dissipated heart, to rise to Him through Whom all things subsist, and to unite herself to Him by the most perfect conformity ! Like the lover in the canticle, all things depict to her her Beloved. This view alone suffices for perfection ; it is the source of all good, and the preservative from all evil. What object is more capable of inspiring her with horror for sin than Jesus suffering to destroy it ? What master is more eloquent to teach her virtue than the *Word made flesh*, Who instructs more by example than by words ? Who can conceive better ideas of virtue, than a recollected religious soul ? With the light of her divine Spouse, she soon becomes deeply versed in the study of sanctity. She will unite all that she does to the actions of her divine Master, and faithful to enter into herself before acting, she will endeavor to do everything as perfectly, as He did. Would she dare to add vices to His virtues ? impatience to His meekness ? murmurs to His silence ? dissipation to His recollection and modesty ? She will, therefore, overcome herself continually, in order to form her conduct on His, to keep up the divine union which she has contracted with Him, and which, alone, constitutes her merit. Her actions thus united to those of the Man God, will breathe a certain quality, which will elevate, ennoble, and consecrate them. They will derive from Jesus Christ

all that might, otherwise, be wanting to them. Detached from Him, they would be useless for heaven, even if not criminal; "they would be," says St. Augustine, "at least so many steps out of the way, but united and concurring with Jesus Christ, they will have divine merit." A feeble sigh, a short prayer, the least act of mortification, piety, or charity, done for Jesus, in Jesus, and through Jesus, changes the nature of an act, and gives it infinite value for heaven. Yes, heaven, and its eternity will not be too much to reward it, because it is Jesus Christ Himself Who in her, and with her, prays, acts, and suffers. Thus, according to St. Paul, Jesus Christ in her will be her hope of her glorious resurrection. Living in Him, there is no grace or glory which she is not to expect from Him. He communicates to her all His rights. What a consolation this will be for her in the sufferings of this life, and what a tender confidence when she shall descend into the tomb! Jesus Christ is her judge,—having always been united to Him, He is hardly distinct from her; how, then, could He not be favorable to her? He who gives her everything deserves at least her gratitude, and that she will put something into the common treasury. The head gives much more to the members than he receives from them, but the members have their proper functions, with which they must second the head, that the body may be perfect. She is, therefore, careful to study assiduously Jesus Christ, to love Him, and compassionate His sufferings, to lament the persecutions of His Church, to repair the many outrages offered Him in the world, as well as in the cloister. She will rejoice at His glory, and at the happy success of the enterprises, which may cause Him to be known, loved, and adored. She will preserve an extreme purity of heart, mind, and body. In fine, she will love tenderly and constantly all those whom faith has given her for sisters, by supporting her less fortunate, imperfect, suffering, and may be vicious neighbors; by never offending or scandalizing anyone, cherishing even those who may hate her, and this because Jesus Christ still loves them, has not cut them off from His body, the Church, nor withdrawn from them their rights, and still requires from her, in them, and for them, proofs of her gratitude and love.

Thus thought, thus acted, those two souls, St. Francis of Sales, and St. Chantal, so intimately united to Jesus Christ, Who possessed all their minds and hearts, Who was always present with them everywhere. United to this divine object, they referred to Him all their actions, and, by this sacred intercourse, they drew closer and closer the bonds that united them to Him. In the most ordinary actions, as in the most important, before, during, and after each of the actions of their lives, spiritual or temporal, God, His good pleasure, and His glory, was their only end. Whoever could have penetrated into these august sanctuaries of Jesus Christ would have seen how superior these holy souls were to all human motives, how they ennobled everything by the purest love, and how they sought God and Him alone, would have understood that it was from this tender, consummated union, which existed between them and the Man-God, that proceeded those traits of sanctity which shone in them; those heroic and miraculous actions, wherein there glided nothing foreign, nothing human, nothing that did not mark the most intimate union of their intentions with those of Jesus Christ.

Second Point.

I perceive, O heavenly Father, that I shall never draw upon me Thy favoring looks, unless, like Jacob, who obtained the blessing of his father by appearing under the garb of Esau, I appear in Thy presence, clothed with the spirit of Thy divine Son. My works, if not united with those of Jesus Christ, will be imperfect in Thy eyes, but presented with His, they will be agreeable to Thee; like to the brothers of Joseph, who could obtain no favor by themselves, but who were tenderly embraced, as soon as Benjamin accompanied them. I will, then, apply myself to the science of imitating Thee, O Jesus, and of uniting myself and my feeble actions to Thy virtues. I will no longer ask, like the Jews, what I must do to offer Thy Father works worthy of Him. Thou hast said that the work worthy of God is that we be united in mind and heart by faith and love to Him, Whom He has sent us. That is, I must enter, O Jesus, into Thy sentiments,

practice Thy virtues, animate my actions by Thy Spirit, for the degree of my glory shall be in proportion to the degree of conformity I shall have with Thee, as head of the predestined.

How far am I from the perfect resemblance that should be the glory, the consolation, the life, and the reward of a true Religious of the Visitation. I am united to Thee by faith, but how little I am united to Thee by charity, by the esteem, love, and practice of Thy maxims. I perform good works, but are they vivified by the union they should have with Thee? I profess to know Thee, but have I that knowledge which saves and leads to a union with Thee, and without which works are dead and have no merit? How many prayers, sufferings, and labors are lost, because I have not prayed, suffered, and labored with Thee, and by Thy Spirit? As a religious, I should be but one same thing with Thee; I should banish from my soul everything that is not for Thee, every spirit that is not Thine. I should judge, according to Thy maxims and sentiments, and destroy in myself the empire of the senses and self-love; I should make Thy virtue live in me by a constant and continual practice of every virtue, and give myself up to Thy guidance. I should enter generously into whatever way it shall please Thee to call me, and try to persevere in it constantly. In fine, I should follow, with perfect submission and dependence, the impression and impulse of Thy love. Is it thus I have acted, O my God? Have I not lived according to my inclinations and propensities? Have I not flattered and indulged my senses? Have I not preserved the spirit of the world under the holy habit of religion? Have I not sought to satisfy my views of vain-glory, ambition, interest, and self-love? Was this uniting myself to Thee, O Lord, and acting with Thee? Was this loving what Thou hast loved, and doing what Thou hast done? Is not this, however, the promise I have made as a Christian? and the particular engagement that binds me to Thee, and gives Thee a new right over me as a religious? In consecrating myself to the religious life, have I not declared myself Thy disciple, Thy imitator, Thy daughter? Have I not united myself to Thee by three indissoluble bonds? By my three vows,

have I not placed Thee in full possession of my being? Have I not made Thee an absolute and irrevocable gift? I have sacrificed to Thee the goods of earth by the vow of Poverty; I have submitted to Thee my senses by the vow of Chastity; and I have despoiled myself for Thee of my own will by the vow of Obedience: what remains to me that is not Thine and at Thy disposition. After such a formal engagement, can I retract, without failing in fidelity? I have left the hundred-fold, that is the happiness of the present life, for that pledge of an eternal recompense, which Thou hast promised me, O Jesus, if I unite and bind myself to Thee. I devote myself, then, entirely, and forever to Thee, O my Saviour; I subject to Thee all my powers, all my faculties, all my actions, that Thou mayest be the soul of my soul, and that I may no longer live but for Thee, with Thee, and in Thee. Come, then, amiable Jesus, and take full possession of a heart that belongs to Thee by so many titles, and that gives Thee still more by the gift which I renew to Thee to-day. Enter into Thy rights, banish all that withdraws it from Thee. In whatever manner, Thou disposest of me, whether Thou dost elevate or abase me, console or afflict me, destine me for one place or another, dost cause my soul to be in darkness or in light, in pain, dryness, or desolation, or in the abundance of heavenly sweetness; in the splendor of Thy glory, or the humiliation of Thy cross; in whatever path Thou pleasest to lead me with or after Thee, Thou wilt find me equally submissive. Thou wilt call me, and I shall answer Thee; Thou wilt inspire me and I shall act; Thou wilt make known to me Thy divine will, and I shall conform to it. I will no longer esteem or desire anything but in accordance with Thy esteem and inclination. I will seek nothing but what Thou dost seek in me. All that Thou despisest, I will despise; what Thou dost condemn, I will condemn. Thou wilt be my study, Thy interest will be mine, for I am henceforth but one with Thee. I will dwell in Thee, and my spirit shall never be separated from Thine. Thou wilt be its centre, and it shall be occupied with Thee alone.

Thou wilt unite my thoughts and inclinations, Thou wilt be the only principle of my works. I will have but one

same will with Thee. I will live but of Thy life, or rather I shall not live, but Thou wilt live in me; I will say, still more, all shall die in me, and Thou, alone, O Jesus, shalt live.

In my earnest desire that Thou shouldst reign in me, and knowing all the unworthiness of my actions, I unite them to Thine, O divine Saviour, that they may be transformed and become worthy of Thee.

At my awaking, I will unite the first moment of the day, the first of my thoughts, the first movement of my heart to the sentiments Thou hadst in Thy Incarnation. I will unite the offering of the day to that which Thou didst make to Thy Father, from the first moment of Thy birth, when Thou didst offer Thyself as a victim to be immolated to His glory.

I will have these same views in going to prayer, or to holy Mass; I will unite myself to Thy immolation on the altar. If in these precious moments, my mind and heart are empty and in dryness, I will remember that Thou art present; I will offer Thee to Thy Father, as a good that belongs to me by His own gift to me. I will protest to Him that I will never be separated from Thee. I will place my cold heart in Thine, which is all love, that I may love with Thy divine Heart.

In singing the divine Office, I will unite myself to Thy zeal, when Thou didst drive from the temple those, who there bought and sold; I will imitate Thee by banishing from my soul which is Thy living temple, all affections foreign to Thy worship.

In reading, or in study, I will apply all Thy divine words to myself, as if Thou didst speak to me in person.

In my troubles and temptations, I will unite myself to Thee, Who didst will to be tempted for the consolation of Thy elect; I will be strengthened by the humiliations to which Thou didst submit. Thus, I will find my happiness in all that crucifies me, since the cross will be, not only a trait of resemblance with Thee, but a new bond, which will unite me more intimately with Thee.

If I pray, I will represent Thee praying to Thy Father, either in the temple, or on the mountain, whither Thou didst retire to pray.

If I fast, I will recall the austerity of Thy fast in the desert.

In serving the sick, I will remember the goodness with which Thou didst cure them.

In going and coming, I will unite myself to Thee going through Judea.

If I am decried, accused, betrayed, forgotten, I will recall the detractions and calumnies, with which the Pharisees decried Thee, Thy condemnation at every tribunal, and the perfidy of one of Thy disciples.

If, at any time, I receive praise, or am elevated to honors, I will remember Thy interior disposition in the midst of the homage Thou didst receive at Thy solemn entry into Jerusalem.

In my repasts, I will think of those Thou didst take with Joseph and Mary. Hunger will make me remember that which Thou, with Thy Apostles, didst suffer, when they were obliged to gather the ears of corn in the country, even on the Sabbath. Thirst will make me think of that which Thou didst suffer on Calvary.

If separation from my relatives or friends causes or renews some feeling of sensibility, I will think of Thy farewell to Thy blessed Mother and beloved disciple.

In sadness, I will recall what Thou didst feel in the garden of Olives.

In sickness and affliction, I will unite myself to Thy sufferings.

In the hour of death, I will think of Thy agony.

In all the situations of my life, I will recall the remembrance of the different actions of Thy holy humanity; I will unite my actions to Thine; I will imprint Thee in all my senses and powers; I will form Thy image in my whole person, to increase every day according to the advice of the Apostles, in the love and union I should have with Thee.

SIXTH DAY.

CONFERENCE.—ON PRAYER.

"WITH desolation is all the land made desolate: because there is none that considereth in the heart."—Jer. xii., 11.

If there are so few saints among the children of God, it is because so few apply themselves, seriously, to meditate upon the truths of salvation. What special means does religion offer, particularly to a daughter of the Visitation, to know and love Jesus Christ, and be united to Him? Prayer. "This holy practice," says St. Francis of Sales, "unites, as in a single point, the knowledge and love of our divine Saviour, and union with Him." It is a key that opens for us His sacred Heart. Its effect is to unite our soul to Him, in such a manner, that nothing can separate us from Him. "This exercise," says our holy Father, speaking to us, "is the greatest of blessings for you. It is your particular portion; your hearts will wither away, if you do not make prayer your nourishment. Prayer will make you enjoy the loving presence of your divine spouse. It will establish you in so sweet, simple, and perfect a union with Him, that nothing is left to be desired. By prayer, your hearts will be touched in a lively manner with heavenly love. You will be filled and occupied with His presence. You will learn His holy will, and receive strength to embrace what is most agreeable to Him in the practice of solid virtue."

Thus, this master of a spiritual life, expressed his own experience. His maxims, discourses, conduct, and writings breathed and taught prayer. It suffices to give here an extract of what this oracle of perfection has said on this point, to trace its rules. and inspire esteem for this important practice. What lesson more secure for a Religious of the Visitation.

"Prayer," says St. Francis of Sales, "is a general and universal movement of all the powers of the soul which, rising above itself, seeks a union with God. This divine movement cannot be acquired by the study of the

mind, nor by the efforts of the will. We must humbly ask it of our Lord, patiently wait for it, receive it with gratitude, and second it by fidelity. There are methods and rules given for prayer. It is well, especially in the beginning, to make use of them, lest we tempt God and lose our time; but we must not attach ourselves to them, and should be ready to quit them, in order to follow the impulse of our divine Master, and subject ourselves only to His grace."

Among all rules, the most excellent is to prepare our souls before prayer. There is a remote and an immediate preparation. The first is made before prayer, the second, in prayer. The first consists in a reformation of manners, recollection of the mind and senses. The second consists in removing obstacles, and seeking the means of elevating our souls to God. The obstacles are creatures, our sins, and ourselves, that is the noise and crowd of created beings, the weight and corruption of our bodies, our weaknesses, and our nothingness. We must, therefore, first, banish from our imagination created objects, which are clouds that prevent our seeing the beautiful light of truth, and we must establish ourselves strongly in the presence of God by an act of adoration. Secondly, we must form an act of contrition, by which we detest our sins, which render us unworthy to approach God. Thirdly, we must enter into our nothingness, and humble ourselves before His adorable Majesty at the sight of His riches and our poverty; His greatness and our lowliness; His infinite power and our extreme weakness. Then, we should invoke the Holy Spirit, call Him into our hearts, that He may do, or enable us to do what we of ourselves cannot. Then, make an act of oblation of all we have to God, renouncing our own lights, and abandoning ourselves into His holy hands, prostrating, like the Magi, in all humility before Him, to offer Him ourselves rather than our gifts.

After all this, we must call to our mind the subject upon which we purpose to meditate, or rather, we should give ourselves up to God as far as the creature is capable. There should be no effort of the understanding. The more tranquil and simple prayer is, the more fruitful it is. We should gently occupy ourselves, without violence or con-

straint, upon the truth, maxim, mystery, virtue, or perfection about which we had proposed to meditate. We should avoid long discourses; limit ourselves to single views upon what God does or demands, in the mystery or virtue we are considering, and give ourselves up in peace to the light of God, by the entire abandonment of our understanding to His holy will. The less effort we make, the farther the divine light penetrates into our soul, and the more strongly it is impressed on our mind. It is often like a flash of light that bursts through a cloud. Its favors are rare and momentary. They are procured only by humility, acknowledging ourselves nothing, incapable of anything. When God chooses to act in a soul, He renders her learned in a short time. He impresses on her the truths He wishes her to know, with lights so intelligible, that she is far better instructed than she would have been by long arguments. From the knowledge of divine things, we must pass to affections. Consideration is only a prelude, and preparation to love. Affections should form the principal part of prayer. In them, we must pour out our heart, elevating and uniting it to God. We must act like a beggar at the door of a rich man. To excite compassion, he discovers his misery, poverty, nakedness, and infirmities. It is thus we must expose to God our indigence and weakness, without asking for any thing particularly. We should simply say: "Behold my nothingness and my pain." Good prayer does not require that we pour ourselves out in many affections and multiplied acts. No, they who pray are as angels of earth, for the prayer of the angels and blessed in heaven does not consist in multiplied acts, but in one single act of love alone, which will not be interrupted for all eternity. Prayer must imitate the beatific vision, and, since it is a sort of school wherein we learn to do what we are to continue eternally, it should retrench a multiplicity of acts. Thus, limited to a single act of love, it will keep the soul, for one or several hours, united to the inexhaustible source of all good.

The resolutions should be short, so that, being more easily represented to the mind, they may become the principle of all the good works we perform. They may

be general, or particular: *general*, as to abandon ourselves to the will of God and His designs over us, to do all the good He shall please, to correct all that displeases Him in us; *particular*, as to correct such or such a fault in particular, whose enormity has been more manifested in prayer, to acquire or practice such a virtue, of which we have perceived the beauty and necessity; to avoid such or such an occasion, of which we know the danger. As we should not follow our own will, even in the practice of good, and as we cannot execute it of our own strength, we must present our resolutions to God, and ask His grace to accomplish them for His glory, making Him the oblation of our thoughts, words, powers, and whole being, consecrating to Him, without reserve, all that exists, giving the earth and its fruits, yet persuaded that He has no need of us or of our gifts.

In fine, we should conclude our prayer by a little review of how we have made it, beg pardon for our faults, and thank God for the graces we have received in it.

It is an excellent practice to recall often during the day, the resolution made in morning prayer, to reanimate in our hearts the holy flames therein enkindled; especially in going to holy Communion, we should draw from our prayer the disposition with which we should approach it. We should see in Jesus on our altar, the same perfections that we had considered, adored, and loved in our prayer. We should ask the same virtues, and form the same acts with which prayer had been filled. Thus the soul, by the repeated influence of prayer, will act with more perfection and suavity.

“But as the soul advances in contemplation,” says St. Francis of Sales, “she must simplify these acts, entertaining herself with God, and separating herself more and more from sensible objects, that she may be more closely united to Him, and become more capable of receiving the impressions of His grace. Some imagine that they have not made their prayer well, unless the considerations precede their affections, although this is the end for which the considerations are made. Such persons resemble those, who, finding themselves at the place whither they were going, turn back because they did not come by the road they

had intended. There are some who do not make use of the imagination, that is, who meditate purely and simply upon the mysteries of our faith, conversing familiarly with our Lord, without picturing to themselves what He has done and suffered for us. This manner is more elevated, and is better, holier, and safer. Therefore, we should follow our attraction, always keeping our mind in a holy liberty, to follow the lights and movements which God gives us."

Prayer is not a work of the mind, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit, Who elevates the powers of the soul above their natural strength, to unite them to God by sentiments and communications, which all the wisdom of men cannot effect without Him. We must, therefore, follow the method which helps us in this holy exercise, the most divine employment of a reasonable creature. All ways are wonderful in their diversity, and we should have respect for them, because they lead to God, and are under the guidance of God. But we should not attempt to follow them all, or even to choose any one of our own movement. The important point is to discover the attraction of grace and follow it.

"Let me tell you, however," says St. Francis of Sales to his daughters, "what I have learned by long experience, relative to the kind of prayer most ordinary among you and most conformable to your spirit. It seems to me that God conducts almost all the daughters of the Visitation to the prayer of a most simple unity and singular simplicity of His presence, by a most perfect abandonment to His good pleasure and Providence, which I call the prayer of the simple placing of the soul in the hands of God. It is so salutary that, I assure you, it comprises all you can desire to glorify God according to your Institute."

"It sometimes happens that God tries your soul, and prepares it for an excellent degree of prayer by great aridities, which continue as long as His infinite wisdom judges proper. Do not be astonished to find yourself in this state; continue to produce interior acts, which, although without taste, are not without profit, utility, and merit. The prayer of patience and submission is not less agreeable to God than the sweetest enjoyment. Keep yourself sweetly in His presence, like a slave before his lord, or a child at

the feet of its father. Produce, from time to time, acts of confidence, love and fidelity, and, above all, make acts of generous desire to correct your defects. Do not notice if these acts be agreeable to you or not; it is enough if they please your God."

"If you are faithful to this, be assured that you will not stop here, for the prayer of the Daughters of the Visitation almost always ends in great simplicity and repose in God. There are different degrees of this state, some possessing it more eminently than others. Nevertheless, they all attain it, without perceiving it until they have reached it. All consists in being faithful to the attraction of the Holy Spirit, and waiting with humility for that blessed moment, which our Lord has destined for giving it. Trust in Him. To reach God, you must suffer yourselves to be guided by Him. His choice is always the best for you. But, whilst others, who have the happiness of being admitted to the table of the Son of God, occupy themselves in tasting the various dishes that are served, you will have entered into this sweet repose, will be permitted to rest on His sacred bosom, by a simple confidence and a loving submission of all your desires and affections. Do not quit this method of prayer; those who abandon it seem to quit their centre. They lose their liberty of spirit and find themselves in a certain restraint which deprives them of peace and greatly retards their advancement in the ways of God."

"Happy the soul who shall persevere in this holy exercise of dependence upon the will of God, profound submission to His orders, and great purity and simplicity of heart. Her fidelity will at length overcome all obstacles to her progress. She will find peace in the midst of war, light after darkness, rest after labor. She will find Jesus and His graces in her annihilation, the only good which forms the beatitude of the saints."

"Prayer opens the treasures of heaven and disposes of its riches in favor of many amongst you. Let them be faithful to the guidance of the divine Spirit, let them nourish themselves with the love and conversation of their tender Father, with that true sweetness without which the heart is devoid of life, and life gives no happiness; let

them apply themselves to see but God, to will but God. Let them be inebriated with that delicious wine which will make them live more in God than in themselves. O delicious union, in which nothing is said between the soul and God, but heart speaks to heart by a secret method communicable only to her who practises it. Not only does the tongue speak, but also the eyes, and every other sense. Silence holds the place of words. The sacred Lover opens the heart, pours in His sweetness, and the soul, filled with love, exclaims: "I have found Him whom my soul loveth: I hold Him; and I will not let Him go. Cant. III., 4. Dying to herself, she lives only in her Beloved. He collects all the powers of her soul into the bosom of His sweetness, which leads her to exclaim in transport: O, yes, Lord, I am all Thine without exception. Draw me more and more to Thy Sacred Heart; let Thy love consume me; let me be entirely absorbed in Thee, and Thy divine perfections."

"O blessed, indeed, are these holy souls," continues St. Francis of Sales, "who hear our Lord speaking within them, and receive from His lips words of sweet consolation! Happy the ears closed to all the tumult of this world, to be open only to the mysterious murmur of the sweet words of love!" But how will the soul attract Jesus Christ and retain Him? Behold the secret: be humble and peaceful, and Jesus will be with you; be detached and simple, and Jesus will abide with you; renounce fully and absolutely created and perishable things, and Jesus will possess you. Many there are who desire contemplation, but few who devote themselves to the exercises that lead thereto. The great obstacle to prayer is want of mortification. Empty your heart of its affections, and you will taste the sweetness of God; leave all, and you will find all,—to say all is to except nothing. All the efforts of creatures cannot merit this precious gift, but God is so good that He usually grants it to great and constant efforts. Should it never be granted, there will always remain the infinite merit of perfect abnegation. But God makes Himself heard by the mind, and loved by the heart; be attentive and faithful. The moment passes quickly in which God communicates Himself to the soul, especially when He

desires to be inseparably united to it ; then, be attentive to that special moment. He often manifests Himself to the soul only to animate her to undertake every thing for His love.

What can be added to these solid instructions, drawn from the works of this great master and disciple of prayer? Nothing, certainly, except that this holy prelate, in sketching the portrait of a soul faithful to the communications of God in prayer, has sketched his own ; and that in dictating the way to be followed, he has traced that which he, himself, followed. His historians, particularly St. Chantal, tell us that he lived by prayer. Lost, drowned, abyssed in God, without yet actually being in Heaven, he did not fail to attain that hidden and unknown life, incredible to men who walk according to the flesh, but a consoling, desirable, and delicious life, in the eyes of spiritual men. He reached this life only through a manner of death, which habitually separated him from himself and creatures. God had gratified him, as he himself said, with much knowledge for understanding the sacred mysteries. He had shed into his soul, or in the point of his mind, so clear a light, that he saw, with a simple glance the excellence of the truths of faith. This caused him ardors, ecstasies, and ravishments of will ; he submitted by a single acquiescence and sentiment of his will to these truths that were shown him. He called the place where these lights were, the Sanctuary of God, where nothing enters but the soul is alone with its God. This was the place of his retreat and most ordinary abode ; notwithstanding his continual exterior occupations, he kept his mind in that interior solitude as much as he could. He said that his manner of serving God, was to follow Him, without any support of consolation, sentiment, or light, but that of simple faith. For this reason, he loved derelictions, abandonment and interior desolations, or rather, he never noticed if he was in consolation or desolation, but converted all to the profit of his soul.

This conduct had confirmed him in such a habit of prayer, that he desired, saw and loved God in all things. He even became, in proportion as he advanced towards the grave, so absorbed in God, that having no longer time to make prayer, on account of the multitude of his occupa-

tions, he, one day, made this reply to his holy daughter, St. Chantal, whom she asked him if he had made it. He said that he had not been able to get a moment for it, but that he had done what was as good, because he had kept himself intimately united with God, making prayer of his work and actions. What a model for a Religious of the Visitation !

SEVENTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.----ON THE DIVINE OFFICE.

First Point.

“ADMONISHING one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual canticles, singing in grace in your hearts to God.”—Coloss. iii., 16.

There are two kinds of prayer, mental and vocal.

Mental prayer is an elevation of our mind to God, by the profound consideration of His mercies or His justice ; by an attentive meditation upon subjects of piety ; to draw from them holy affections and efficacious resolutions for the regulation of our conduct. Vocal prayer is that in which we express the affections of our heart by the accents of our voice. This prayer may be either private, made in our own name, for our own wants ; or public, offered in the name of the whole Church, by those deputed thereto, for the necessities of the whole christian world. This should be vocal, that it may be known by the people, for whom it is offered. It is more commonly called the Divine Office, because by reciting daily this prayer, we render to God our services and homages.

Although it is not easy to point out the origin of the Divine Office, or the time when a form and methodical order was given to public prayer, it is certain that, as soon as men formed society, they assembled to offer sacrifices of piety to the Supreme Being. From the beginning of the world, when each one followed the instinct and impression of his private devotion, to know and invoke the Lord was but the same thing.

If from the natural law, we wish to descend to the written law, we find details of the morning and evening sacrifices, of the religious worship which was to be rendered to God by solemn prayers always accompanied by sacrifices. We see there the priests, prostrate between the vestibule and the altar, mediators between God and man, weeping, groaning, asking mercy for the iniquities of the people. We there read that David sang seven times a day the praises of the Lord.

But it is principally in the law of grace, since the institution of the Church, that there have been certain hours in the day and night, when the ministers of the altar assemble with the faithful, to pray in the temples, and, in times of persecution in vaults and recesses. St. Peter and St. John went up to the Temple to assist at the prayer that was made there at the ninth hour. St. Paul and Silas arose at midnight to praise God. The apostles entrusted zealous persons with the offices of charity and the service of the poor, that they might employ themselves in prayer, and the ministry of the word. From this we find, that from the commencement of the Church, there have been two functions attached to the holy ministry, prayer and preaching. The functions of the ministers of the Gospel were to preach, instruct, and labor for the conversion of souls. Others have more particularly had prayer for their portion. In course of time, religious men and women became associated with these same intentions. They must, by their piety, cause the labors of the apostolic men to fructify. Like Moses, they must raise their eyes and hands towards heaven, to support the Joshuas who combat for Israel. One of the obligations of their state is to sing the praises of God. This duty, common to all religious orders, is equally and essentially attached to the quality of a Religious of the Visitation. The divine Office is a sacred tribute which religion daily requires from her. In this respect, she is a minister of the Church. The faithful, engaged in the embarrassments of the world, rely upon her zeal and fervor. They confide to her their desires, their prayers, their groans, that she may carry them to the throne of God in their name. She is their tongue, their voice. They have chosen her as their inter-

preter, their mediator. Her obligation is to offer to the Lord the sacrifice of her lips for their sins and her own. Whilst they are occupied with the affairs of the world, her state requires her to be occupied with those of heaven; and whilst they, perhaps, are given up to their pleasures, and arouse the anger of God by their crimes, it is her office to lift up her pure hands to appease Him by the voice of her tears, Whilst they blaspheme the name of the Lord, it is her office, as deputed by the tribes of Israel, to praise and bless Him. It is to leave her the enjoyment of perfect liberty in the exercise of these sacred functions, that she has been disengaged from all worldly solicitudes. It is true, that she is obliged only to the small Office, but for this very reason, she should assist at it with more exactitude. The obligation is less than that which is imposed on others; therefore, her fervor should supply the deficiency. By the union which exists between all religious orders, the prayers of one member become common to the community. A daughter of the Institute should then contribute all she can to the common fund into which others put infinitely more than she. St. Francis of Sales prescribes the strictest rules for the recitation of the Office; here is what he says.

“She sees a ray of light and enjoys a ravishing sweetness which no one knows but the heart that feels it, and the heart that feels it scarcely knows it, because, often, what it feels passes away almost immediately. Often, when she wishes to embrace and retain Jesus Christ, she hears these sad words: “Approach Me not; it is not yet time to enjoy Me; wait until I have entered into My glory, or rather, until you come to Me. There remains much for you to do and suffer.” Thus God often manifests Himself to the soul to animate her to undertake everything for His love. She would never be worthy of His visits, if she took too much consolation in them. It is in prayer that the soul is exercised and tried; there it is, she undertakes the most heroic enterprise for her perfection. It is in prayer, that she rests from her labors; it is from prayer, that she derives strength to perform her duties. Contemplation and action are inseparably united. She has the greatest esteem for special favors, but she judges

herself unworthy of them and does not ask for them. She suffers nothing in herself, she does nothing which can oblige God to deprive her of them. If He bestows them, she esteems the Author of the gifts more than the gifts themselves. She is ready to sacrifice them, when He orders it, or when the service of this same God obliges her to deprive herself of them.

“As soon as she hears the sound of the bell, which calls her to the divine service, let her go diligently to the choir. She should, in imitation of St. Bernard, ask herself what she is going to do, that she may enter upon this exercise with a proper spirit. She should remember that she is about to speak to a God, Who is the Sovereign of Sovereigns; in the name of Jesus Christ, the Saint of Saints; in the name of the Church, who is the pure spouse of a Spouse infinitely pure. Therefore what purity should she, herself, not have? She should, at least, be without any attachment to sin, lest, instead of drawing upon the people the graces of the Lord, she should draw His maledictions upon them, as well as upon herself.”

The second rule her holy founder imposes on her is attention of mind. There are three kinds of attention; first, attention to the words she recites; second, attention to the sense of the words; and third, attention to God, to Whom she speaks. The first requires that she pronounce, sing and say the Office as directed, that is, distinctly, and without precipitation, avoiding that rapidity which scarcely distinguishes between the beginning and ending of the verse, which wearies her without attaining the end she proposed to herself, and which makes of the divine psalmody only a confused noise. This attention is necessary, but it is not enough. She must attend to the sense of the words. “Let those,” continues he, “who understand what they say in the Office, employ faithfully this talent, according to the good pleasure of God, Who has given it to them to aid them in keeping themselves recollected, by means of the good affections they may thence draw. They who do not understand the words must simply keep themselves attentive to God, or they may make affectionate aspirations, whilst the other choir say their part. But, whatever they do, they must be very

attentive, respectful, modest, and recollected, before the divine Majesty, Who listens to their prayer. Let them consider that they are performing the same office as the angels, although in a different language, and that they are in the presence of the same God, before Whom the angels tremble. With what modesty do we present ourselves before the kings of earth to obtain favors? Such should be the conduct of a true daughter of the Institute before the King of Kings." "They must not, however," says their holy founder, "be troubled about the involuntary distractions they experience. How great soever they may be, they must not be disquieted, but simply reject them, from time to time before God; for there is much difference between feeling and consent."

We daily experience, that in spite of us, a thousand distractions trouble our prayer, that our volatile spirit, every moment agitated by the importunate objects that strike it, can, with great difficulty, fix itself upon something it does not see. We know that, often, notwithstanding all our precautions, a crowd of vain thoughts elude our vigilance and find entrance to our minds. Has man the power to prevent the corruptible and material body from weighing down the soul? Can he hinder the imagination, fruitful in representations and images, from interrupting the most important actions of the spirit? Therefore, God, on account of our weakness, is satisfied with an habitual attention, which subsists in virtue of the first intention of praising, honoring and glorifying Him, and of obtaining graces from Him. But if, on the contrary, the impression and influence of this first intention should fail, by admitting voluntary distractions, or by not guarding our senses during the Office; if we do not recall our fugitive mind, to the only object which should fix it as soon as we perceive the distraction, we convert one of the most excellent acts of religion into a sin and deprive it of all merit. It has no longer the power to obtain graces, for the Scripture tells us that God does not hear the prayers of him, who thinks not of God when he prays. But, how can we fix our attention? Ah! the mind would be more attentive, if the heart were more fervent, and this fervor is the third condition for the recitation of the divine Office.

Since the heart commands all the faculties, everything is distracted when it goes astray, and nothing in us prays, when the heart ceases to pray. God examines and sounds the motions of the heart. His penetrating looks do not stop at the surface. A counterfeit modesty does not touch Him. A composed exterior does not deceive Him. In vain do we honor Him with our lips, in vain do we sing His praises, if our heart is far from Him. Without fervor all becomes useless; our singing is but an empty sound which strikes the ear and falls back of its own weight. Thence arise disgust, weariness, languor, and weakness. If love does not awaken prayer, it is impossible for the mind to sustain it. To do our duty with pleasure, we must love it; we must be led to it by powerful motives. Now, were there no duty other than that of responding to the Canticles, with which the heavenly Jerusalem incessantly resounds for the glory of God, what a powerful motive this would be for the heart of a true religious! What more holy and glorious for her, than to do on earth what the blessed are doing in heaven, and what she herself will do there, if she attains the same happiness? But that which should animate her fervor is to consider, that in saying the Office, she prays as a minister of Jesus Christ, and as a minister of the Church. As a minister of Jesus Christ, she prays in His name, with Him and by Him. She should, therefore, unite herself perfectly to His spirit, and enter into the same dispositions of respect, devotion, and fervor, which He had when He prayed to His Father. / As a minister of the Church, she is deputed by her to intercede in behalf of sinners, who are her children, criminal as they may be. She is to perform the office of mediatrix between God and them, and obtain their pardon and reconciliation. With what humility and respect should she not conduct herself in so august a ministry? Treating in the name of sinners, should she not enter into the dispositions proper for criminals? Should she not remember the love and fervor, with which the Church, that tender mother, prays to the Eternal Father, and endeavor to imitate her?

In fine, she is not only obliged to be present in the choir, but also to sing there. It is not a mere presence

in person, that the Church requires. It is her solemn duty to support the chant, to share with her Sisters the labor as well as the merit of this pious exercise. She must form with them, by the union of her voice, the harmonious concert in which the Church militant, and the Church triumphant join their heavenly accords, in honor of the divine Majesty. To this she is bound in quality of a choir Religious. If she has the title, she is to perform the functions, how fatiguing soever they may appear, to her. Such is this obligation according to the idea of St. Francis of Sales, who says: "that when from some indispensable cause, she enters the choir after the Office has been commenced, she must take her rank with the others, and sing the Office with them; and afterwards resume what the choir had previously said."

Second Point.

How ill I have hitherto acquitted myself, O my God, of the obligations I have to the Office. The highest powers of heaven tremble before Thee, O Lord, in praising Thee, and I, who am but dust and ashes, recite or sing Thy praises with negligence, precipitation, and even indecorum.

Every condition of life has its occupations and peculiar duties. The soldier has the labor and fatigue of his profession; the minister of justice is continually occupied with the study of the laws, and the care of settling a thousand different interests; the merchant travels over seas and lands, always occupied in troublesome negotiations. The husbandman bears the heat and burden of the day to cultivate the earth and make it produce fruit, and I, destined by my state to perform here below the same office which the Angels do in heaven, I do this work negligently and without piety. This occupation should draw upon the people and upon myself Thy graces and benedictions, whereas, I make it a source of sins, of maledictions, and the subject of my condemnation. What negligence and sloth in attending to this holy exercise! What delays in going to the choir, and what impatience to return from it! How often I absent myself from it through disgust,

or indifference, without any reason or necessity, and, perhaps, without permission! How often have I been employed in frivolous cares, scarcely reserving for the recitation of my Office, the time necessary not to sin mortally! Have I not often invited creatures to praise Thee, O my God, at the rising of the sun, when it had already set? Have I not even looked upon the short Office to which I am bound, as an inconvenient burden from which I have sought to rid myself as quickly as possible? Have I not often counted the moments with disquietude, and sung Thy mercies with weariness? Am I not often occupied there with myself and the reflections of my self-love, instead of being occupied with Thee alone? Have I not sought a certain position and rest of body and mind which pleased me? How many amusements, dreams, and voluntary distractions? What movements of piety, which have passed with the rapidity of lightning? Given up to all the levity of a mind occupied with everything but Thee, the divine object, which should fill it, have I not admitted a crowd of frivolous thoughts, for which the time of prayer was like a signal? By this want of attention, the divine light and tender affections, diffused throughout the psalms, have scarcely touched my soul, and left it void of sentiment and entirely dry. What a contradiction! I would scruple to omit the least part of the Office, and I do not scruple saying the whole of it without attention and fervor. How often have I been as a sounding brass, a tinkling cymbal, O my God! Yet I pretended to touch Thy Heart and satisfy my obligation; since, according to the Apostle, to render this prayer fruitful and meritorious, we should support the chant with attention of mind and fervor of heart. How far have I withdrawn from these dispositions in bringing, as preparation to the Office, only the fear of its length and restraint; in going to it as late as possible without considering the demands of the rule and propriety; assisting at it, as at a spectacle where I was constrained to be, without drawing any other fruit than that of coldly pronouncing many words, whose meaning and virtue I took no pains to penetrate; in softly yielding to the first feeling of weariness? How often has not my

heart contradicted what my lips pronounced, and I removed myself far from Thee, whilst I incessantly repeated Thy Name. O, my divine Saviour! where is my faith, respect, and my love for Thee? Are we distracted, or wearied when conversing with a friend, a father, a spouse? How great is my ingratitude, my blindness. The angels tremble with fear before Thy throne, and I yield to languor, weariness, and disgust; they are inflamed with the fire of Thy fear, and I am frozen there; they thrill with joy and pleasure, and I am but dryness and languor; they cannot take their eyes from Thee, and I cannot, for a moment, keep mine fixed on Thee, O object infinitely amiable! What an outrage, O Lord, what punishments of Thy justice do I not draw upon myself! Far from expecting from Thee a recompense for service so badly fulfilled, and so unworthy of Thy Majesty, have I not reason to dread Thy most severe chastisements? Ah! what is my blindness! If in the midst of one of these offices, at which I assist with so much indevotion, my faith should suddenly revive, would I not see Thee filled with indignation and fury? Would I not hear Thee reproach me with the wanderings of my mind, the insensibility of my heart, my baseness, tepidity and irreverence? Wouldst Thou not say to me by the Royal Prophet; "Why dost thou profane My praises, by uttering them with thy impious mouth?"

Pardon me, O Lord, and mercifully suffer Thy anger to be appeased. Thy tender heart strikes with regret those for whom it still preserves the sentiments of a Father. Let me then arrest the arm of Thy justice by my tears and humiliations. I will expiate my tepid prayers by fervent ones. Henceforth abyssed in Thy divine presence, annihilated at the foot of Thy throne, I will in some manner constrain Thy mercy, by my respect and adorations. I will acquit myself of the divine Office with zeal and love. I will render myself worthy of singing Thy praises, by living in the greatest purity and most perfect mortification of my senses. I will proceed joyfully to the choir, as soon as I hear the bell that calls me thither. I will endeavor to be penetrated with the same sentiments of respect with which the blessed are filled before Thy

throne. I will invoke Thy spirit to come and take possession of my soul, to form there sentiments conformable to the words which my mouth will utter, that it may be not I who speak, but Thyself, Who speakest in me and by me. Every word that I say I will pronounce as though it were my own. I will be penetrated with the affections which the words I recite or sing express, or if I do not understand the meaning of the words, I will entertain myself with Thy mysteries, and will unceasingly reanimate my faith by reiterated and fervent acts. I will watch over my senses; I will give no occasion to distractions either by curious looks, or useless words. As soon as I shall perceive that my mind or my heart wanders from Thee, I will ask Thy pardon; I will humble myself for my weakness; I will renew my application with more fervor; I will conjure Thee to fix my mind, and to unite my heart to Thine. I will consume myself as a holocaust of love, by the fervor of my prayers. Each word that I pronounce will be like a flame from my heart, will ascend to Thy throne, to renew to Thee my attachment, my ardor and respect. The celebration of Thy divine Sacrifice will be, for me, a species of transport and ravishment. I will avoid every posture too convenient or wanting in propriety. I will not spare my voice; it cannot be employed in a more glorious exercise. In singing with my lips, I will also sing with my heart, according to the counsel of the Apostle, being persuaded that I speak to Thee, O Lord, and that Thou speakest to me; that I say nothing but what Thy holy spirit dictates to me. After the Office, I will ask pardon for the involuntary distractions I may have had, and for the negligences I have committed. I will purify all my defects in Thy precious Blood, and when I go from the choir it shall be as from heaven, all penetrated with Thee.

Give me Thy grace, O my God! to fulfil these holy resolutions; pour into my soul that spirit of prayer, which forms in the heart of Thy children those desires, which Thou dost hear and which Thou canst not resist.

SEVENTH DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.—THE INTERIOR LIFE.

First Point.

“YOU are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”—Coloss. iii., 3.

There are, according to the Scriptures, two sorts of life, the one interior, the other exterior; the one terrestrial, animal, carnal, the other spiritual, heavenly, and divine. The difference between these two lives arises from the difference of the objects which occupy the mind and heart, and which cause our joy, our sadness, our love, or our hatred. The exterior life degrades man to the level of the beasts; the interior life elevates him to God. Whoever lives the exterior life, although he may be clothed with the most illustrious titles, is but a base and grovelling soul, whose sentiments do not rise above the earth. A christian, instructed and formed by the Holy Spirit, has eyes only to contemplate things eternal, a mind only to despise what is transient and perishable, a heart only to love God and the interests of His glory. Such a one is truly a noble and great soul, of which the world is not worthy.

The interior life consists in corresponding to what is supernatural, to all the inspirations of God, and all the movements of grace, mixing with these, nothing that is human. Such is, in a few words, the whole teaching of St. Francis of Sales, and such the spirit according to which a true daughter of the Institute acts. She gives to the exterior and natural life only what she cannot refuse it; she is absorbed and lost in the supernatural and interior life. She keeps her mind continually recollected to listen to God, and her heart free to follow Him. She has everywhere, and at all times, her divine Model present before her, and unites herself to Him without interruption. She separates herself from creatures, not only in the exterior but also in the interior. She carries within her a solitude, in which her soul always remains inclosed. “In

a word," says her holy Founder, "she keeps herself hidden with Jesus Christ in God," so that she is entirely annihilated in herself, and lives no longer in herself, but in Him, Who has acquired her life by His own death. "She has renounced the world," says St. Chantal, "to be forgotten by it, no longer to live for or to know it, and that nothing may divert her from her only affair, which is to tend to the perfection of divine love." "Her affections," she says elsewhere, "should be so simply united to God, that nothing should be attached to her, and she should be attached to nothing. Her mind and her heart should be so occupied with our Lord, that even in the exterior employments she must fulfil, she should never lose sight of Him, and should always act in His holy love. In a word, she should walk within herself, in the presence of God, and have no attachment without."

According to these principles of her holy Founders, which were the soul of their conduct, a true daughter of the Visitation makes within herself an interior solitude, where separated from every created object, she concentrates herself and remains with our Lord. Like the angels, who carry heaven with them wherever their functions call them, because they see everywhere the face of God, the religious carries with her this heaven, which is the solitude of the heart, wherever obedience calls her. There, always united to her divine Spouse, she incessantly applies herself to contemplate His greatness, to unite herself more and more to Him, to return Him love for love. Attentive and faithful to her God, she considers Him in all she does. She has no intention but His glory. She consults Him in all her designs. She makes His maxims the rule of her conduct. She relies only upon Him in all her proceedings, and makes His assistance and grace the only foundation of her confidence. Watchful over herself she examines all that passes in her heart, and perceives a thousand natural movements that would escape a dissipated soul, a thousand human views mingled in the best actions, a thousand continual, but almost imperceptible returns of self-love which glide in everywhere. O how many faults such a soul avoids by her vigilance and interior watchfulness! What peace does it not bring to

her soul: what merit does it not attract to her actions! Finally, what perfection does not such a soul attain in doing even the most ordinary things!

Recollection of spirit keeps the soul in the presence of God; and can there be a more sovereign preservative from sin, a shorter and surer way of arriving at perfection? What is more proper for keeping her in regularity and order? What more efficacious for repressing the motions of the passions; for making her triumph over the most violent temptations; for preventing her yielding in the most dangerous occasions; than to think, incessantly, that she is in the presence of God, her Father, and the most faithful of Spouses? What more efficacious means for preserving her from the falls of frailty, and for leading her to perfection than the mingled sentiment of fear and love? This salutary and sweet thought is for her, at once a powerful stimulus, and a source of the sweetest consolation. It sustains and animates her in the labors of her profession. The holy Scripture says: "Let the just soul be filled with a holy joy and penetrated with a salutary fear, since she always views God, and is ever before His eyes."

What in effect, is better calculated to fill a true religious with pure delights, to mitigate her pains, and strengthen her in her combats, than this consoling reflection, "God sees me!" This delightful thought forms her more and more, and makes her advance in the interior life, in the life of love. She remembers that she lives only in the immensity of God, that she has no motion but by His operation, that above her, this magnificent God rewards His own gifts, that below her, this just God punishes the sinner, that around her, a compassionate God serves her in His creatures, that within her, He wishes to be her life, her sentiment, her light, her all. This remembrance stimulates her to sanctity. Her heart, consequently, becomes His dwelling, His chosen abode. Jesus Christ, Himself, purifies this heart. He directs it, possesses it, and renders it a perfect holocaust of love. He makes it an altar, whereon He offers victims to the glory of His Father, and kindles the fire to keep it up without interruption, that fire, which He came on earth to enkindle in the hearts of men. He keeps His divine eyes continually

fixed upon this faithful soul, and this sacred look incessantly wounds her with a new dart of love.

Such are the precious fruits produced by the interior life. But, to gather them, other means are also mentioned by her holy Founders, besides the exercise of the presence of God.

A religious of the Visitation, according to their precepts, must regulate her heart as well as her mind: She is to entertain not only pious thoughts, but also holy sentiments. She must live in the greatest purity of intention. She must sacrifice every attachment that is too human and too natural. In a word, she must practise the most perfect mortification.

To become interior, she must repress the sallies of her humor, her vivacity, her eagerness, and the excess of a joy too dissipating. She must regulate her exterior, be composed, modest, reserved in her manners, in her words, in her actions. Too great a dissipation announces unmortified passions, and a soul unfaithful to the lights and inspirations of grace. She should, therefore, faithfully guard her senses, especially her eyes and ears, because it is through them that dissipating objects enter. She must repress the wanderings of the imagination, and reject all vain and frivolous thoughts.

She must not overcharge herself with occupations how good soever they may be; that is to say, she must undertake none but what duty, obedience, and a well regulated charity require. When occupations are excessive, they usually dissipate the mind, and dry up the heart.

She should establish the greatest order in her actions, performing all through a spirit of obedience to God; accomplishing His will and good pleasure in them all; seeking Him even in the most indifferent, and proposing Him to herself as her only end in everything.

Finally, she should, at the commencement, in the course, and at the end of each action elevate her mind to God by ejaculatory prayers. They are like arrows from a burning heart going direct to the Heart of God, and returning more ardent, and more capable of inflaming the heart whence they first came. These short and fervent prayers should be less the fruit of study or reflection, than the effect of heavenly unction, and an expression of the heart.

They are sparks which rekindle the fire of God's love in the heart. They are to the soul what breathing is to the body ; they refresh and vivify it, they are the sighs of a heart that loves God, but wishes to love Him still more.

Second Point.

How great, how delightful, how glorious is the truly interior life ! But, alas ! how far am I from it, O my God ! In what dissipation of mind and heart have I not hitherto lived ! Consequently, I have lost, perhaps, the fruit of so many years spent in religion. My life exteriorly has been regular enough ; I did not wish to give scandal in the house of God. Reason alone, and the care of my reputation would have made me avoid any criminal or scandalous irregularity ; but can I flatter myself that I have acquired any solid virtue ? On the contrary into what faults have not my dissipation and levity plunged my soul. How have I acquitted myself of my spiritual exercises ? Through what spirit have I fulfilled my duties. What has been my fervor in frequenting the sacraments ? What profit have I drawn from them ? Have I advanced in the way of perfection ? Alas ! Of how many merits have I deprived myself ? How many treasures I might have accumulated ! What perfection might I not have acquired, had I listened to Thy inspirations, O Lord, and followed them ! But, because I have been attentive only to that which strikes the senses, I have lost the life of love. Instead of watching over myself, and concentrating myself in Thee, that I might enjoy the anticipated happiness which is found in recollection, and in the exercise of Thy presence, I have sought vain amusements and noisy diversions in which I poured out my heart. I have indulged in foolish and irregular joy which dissipated my mind. I have formed ties of friendship, which attached me to creatures, and entirely occupied me with them. I have given myself up to desires which agitated and divided my heart, to passions that altered and troubled my soul ; to useless conversations that filled my imagination with trifles ; to superfluous cares, which embarrassed me ; to occupations, in which I voluntarily engaged, that caused me a thousand subjects of distraction. Ah ! if I had

contented myself with Thee, O my God ! occupied myself only with Thee ; concentrated myself in Thee, and limited my desires to Thee, what sweetness, repose, and happiness I would now enjoy in my holy retirement ! Far from applying myself to enjoy so rich a treasure, I have counted every moment that I am alone with Thee or with myself. To relieve my weariness I have yielded to idle and useless thoughts ; have occupied myself with frivolous reading ; I have sought my consolation in the visits of seculars or in entertainments forbidden by my rule. I have called to my assistance all created objects ; I have given myself up to the dissipation of all my faculties. But Thou, O my God, didst oppose this by Thy inspirations and graces. What have I found but remorse and trouble of conscience ? I have lost the relish for Thy divine communications. O heavenly Spouse of my soul ! how unfaithful have I been to Thee ; but I still hope in Thy mercies. Thou inspirest me with the desire, and I return to Thee. Preserve me from a new inconstancy in the practice of the interior life, which I resolve henceforth to lead, with the assistance of Thy grace. Yes, Lord I will concentrate myself with Thee in my own heart, Thou wilt be the sole confidant of my thoughts, the object of all my desires, the term of all my affections, my relaxation, my occupation, my food, my life, my all,—my God hidden with me in solitude, with Whom my retreat is much better than all created goods. Thou alone, will fill my heart in possessing it.

I will unceasingly remember that Thou regardest me ; that Thou art above me by authority ; within me by immensity ; around me by Thy providence ; that Thou hearest all I say ; that Thou seest all I do ; knowest all I think and feel ; that Thou art in me more than I am in myself ; and I will act so that Thou mayest be there by Thy grace and love, as Thou art there by Thy presence. Can I, then, forget Thee, O my God ! Thee who never forgettest me ! Can I ever voluntarily distract myself from Thee, without feeling the injustice and ingratitude of my distraction ? Can I turn my thoughts and eyes on creatures, whilst Thou hast Thy eyes incessantly fixed on me, and I know that it is Thy glance which animates and supports me ? By Thy absence, Lord ! or rather by my voluntary withdrawal from Thee, I have felt

only languor, darkness, bitterness, and disorder. By Thy presence, or rather by my attention to Thy presence, all becomes light to my mind, ardor in my heart, regularity in my soul. Occupied only in seeking Thee I will constantly attract Thee to me ; I will possess Thee without interruption by my attention and respect in listening to Thee ; I will retain Thee by my fidelity in following Thee. Created objects will no longer dissipate me ; intercourse with the world will no longer withdraw me from Thee ; my lightness and inconstancy will be changed ; these distractions, caused by my tepidity, will be withdrawn ; they will no longer occupy in my mind and heart, the place which belongs to Thee alone ; on the contrary all will remind me of Thee, and I will see all in Thee. Thou wilt be to me the source of all good, the principle of true happiness, and the centre of the most delightful pleasure.

Even by my least actions I will animate my love and purity of intention ; then by Thy mercy they will become great in Thy eyes. I will pass from prayer to labor, and from labor to prayer. My occupations will be regulated by obedience, by my rule, and by the necessity of doing penance. I will labor to imitate Thee, O divine Model, to acquire the spirit of my state and fulfil its duties.

I will apply myself to increase in the interior life and to become from day to day more and more humble, more charitable, more mortified, more regular, more recollected ; in a word, more solidly virtuous.

I will, above all, endeavor to sanctify my actions by ardent and frequent elevations of my heart to Thee, Lord ! I will continually raise my hand towards Thy throne, to draw to myself Thy assistance and Thy grace. In a word I will imitate Thy solitude. O my God ! it will be the rule of my interior solitude. Thou hast been in Thyself before all ages, and Thou wilt remain there during all eternity ; Thou dwellest in light inaccessible. There is, then, an infinite distance between Thee and creatures. Thou governest the universe ; Thou dost communicate and unite Thyself intimately to us ; Thou remainest in the midst of us, but all this without interrupting Thy solitude, without losing anything of Thy repose, without turning for a moment from the contemplation of Thy adorable

perfections and love. With the assistance of Thy grace, I will imitate Thee, as much as it is possible for the creature, by withdrawing from created objects ; in making use of visible things only to rise to the invisible ; despoiling myself of all gratification of my senses ; raising my thoughts to Thee. applying myself continually to contemplate and love Thee.

Strengthen me in these holy resolutions, Lord ! grant that I may increase in the interior and supernatural life ; that I may be disengaged from all useless cares and inquietude ; that I may never permit myself to be carried away, by the desire of anything vile or precious ; but that I may look on all things of the world as passing, and myself as passing with them, to be lost in Thee.

SEVENTH DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION.—ON SILENCE.

First Point.

“A WISE man will hold his peace till he sees opportunity ; but a babbler and a fool will regard no time.”—Eccles. xx., 7.

The characteristic of a wise person and especially of a religious, is to speak little. Occupied with divine and heavenly things, she no longer thinks of those of the earth. Engaged in habitual conversations with God, she has no desire to entertain herself with creatures. “The greatest assistance she can have,” says St. Francis of Sales, “is to keep herself in the presence of God, and nothing contributes so much to this as silence.” “In this a Religious of the Visitation should be very exact, remembering that this practice was instituted not only to avoid the faults that are committed by the tongue, but also to preserve recollection by the retrenchment of useless thoughts. The dissipation of mind caused by useless thoughts would unfit her for conversing with her divine Spouse, as she should continually do, that she may

gain new strength, to become more and more capable of laboring in His divine service." "Every Daughter of the Institute," continues our holy Founder, "should have a particular love for silence, and be very careful to keep it on account of the great advantages which are drawn from it. Its utility is so great, that to regulate a monastery, it is enough to establish silence in it; and to introduce laxity, it is sufficient to take away silence."

A sure mark by which it may be known if a community is fervent and regular is the facility and fidelity with which silence is observed; and by a necessary consequence, the most edifying and fervent religious in the house are those who keep silence most exactly in the times and places prescribed by the rule. St. Francis of Sales says, that a sister of the Visitation, who is habitually unfaithful to this practice, will never attain the perfection of her state. Because, to become perfect, it is necessary for her to be interiorly recollected. She must listen to God and follow His divine inspirations, and this is incompatible with the dissipation which usually follows the habitual breaking of silence. This dissipation will make her lose, by degrees, a relish for God. It will insensibly cause her to abandon her rules, her exercises, her practices of piety, so that she will at last retain scarcely anything of the religious except the habit. All the masters of the spiritual life have looked upon silence as the soul of the monastic observance. They say, that it gives life, strength, and motion to fervor. They call it the guardian of innocence, the father of devotion, the master of the interior life, the joy of the heart, the strength of the soul, the rule of manners, the bridle of the passions, the rampart against temptations, the key of religion, the gate of salvation, the principal pillar of the temple of the Lord, the way to heaven. Do the dead speak? says one among them. Are they seen coming from their tombs to converse with creatures? They rest in a profound silence in their lowly sepulchres. Is not a religious by her engagements in a state of death? Is not the cloister her tomb, and should she not rest there in peace in the bosom of the Lord, and keep a profound silence? Or, if she makes some use of her tongue, it should

be only to speak of God, and sing His praises ; to converse with our Lord, or with His saints. Dead to the world and its vanities, she should no longer entertain any commerce with mortal men, who are for her, people of the other world.

“Every thing requires silence of her,” says another Father, God, her own interests, and those of her neighbor. God demands it, because she cannot worthily honor the infinite grandeur of His majesty, but by keeping herself in His presence, in a respectful and silent recollection. She cannot listen as she ought to the oracles of His wisdom, but by closing her eyes to created things, and her ears to conversation with creatures. She must remain dumb, as it were, at the foot of His throne, like a criminal convicted of her own crimes and loaded with those of the world, consequently filled with fear, penetrated with sorrow and covered with confusion. Her interests require it, as it is absolutely essential to preserve her from sin and advance her in the path of justice, which she cannot do without silence. The interests of her neighbor require it, because by her silence she prevents a thousand causes of chagrin that might arise from her discourses, and shelters her neighbors from an infinity of faults caused by speaking.

St. Francis of Sales says, that silence should not be kept through melancholy, chagrin, or humor. It should not be a stupid silence, which would keep her in a sad and gloomy idleness. But it should be a religious silence ; fervent and zealous for the glory of God, regulated by piety and reason, spiritual and divine. It should be for her a means of applying herself to heavenly things, of conversing more intimately with her Creator, of uniting herself more closely with her God. Otherwise, she would profane a holy practice, and would commit a sin for which she must render an account at the last day. True silence should have God only for its principle and end. It should be observed only through a motive of pleasing Him. Its effects should be not only to repress the tongue, and keep it from useless discourses. It should so regulate the tongue, that when she is obliged to speak, she would do so with discretion. Such is the spirit of St. Francis of Sales, and St. Chantal,

“The love of silence,” says our holy Founder, “should be such, that a daughter of the Visitation should go to the parlor only through necessity, and she should remain there as short a time as she can. She should watch over herself when there, more than in any other place, retrenching all useless words, and avoiding long conversations, even with spiritual persons; because many superfluous and useless things always glide in, which are ever dangerous, and the least inconvenience is the loss of time.” “This retrenching of all useless conversations and words,” says he, is so important, that although the Superioress cannot avoid speaking more than the others, she should serve as an example on this point, as upon all the rest. Nor is it permitted for any religious to speak to her in times of silence, except for things really necessary; although she should be the resource of all the sisters, and each one is obliged to look upon her as a mother and as the interpreter of the will of God.” “Jesus Christ alone,” says St. Chantal, “should be the delight and entertainment of a true daughter of our Institute. If her silence be broken, it should be only to speak of Him, of what He has done and suffered for us, of the virtues He has taught us, and which were so perfectly practised by His blessed Mother, by the apostles, and all the other saints. If she finds herself obliged to speak of other things, she should always do it with regret, and use all the discretion and circumspection which have been so recommended to her. Above all, she should abstain from everything that could wound her neighbor, from every unbecoming word, from all incivility and raillery. She should avoid bursts of laughter, the gestures and manners of the world, and everything that denotes any sort of levity. Finally, she should avoid everything that is not suitable for a state that obliges her to render her conversation altogether pure and angelic. She should carefully avoid speaking of herself, as it cannot be done without some emotion of pride and self-love.” Such are the maxims of our holy founders. To reduce them to practice, here are, according to them, the principal rules which a true Religious of the Visitation should observe.

First. Never to wilfully break silence in the times in

which it is prescribed. To receive no visits, but such as are absolutely necessary. To converse with others only when charity or the rule requires it.

Second. When obedience or a lawful reason, approved by the Superior, requires her presence in the parlor, to invoke the Holy Spirit before going there.

Third. When in the parlor and elsewhere, to speak little and only what is necessary.

Fourth. To weigh all she says, that she may utter no word which may displease God or be contrary to her obligations; to place, so to say, all her words in the scales of the judgment of God before pronouncing them.

Fifth. To speak so usefully that what she may say will be better than silence.

Sixth. To speak with simplicity, avoiding all the affected manners of the world; with humility, uttering no word that savors of pride; with meekness, never saying anything harsh, offensive, or disobliging; with truth, avoiding falsehoods, exaggerations, and equivocations; with reserve, repressing all eagerness, and interrupting no one; with religious modesty, avoiding all levity, precipitation, and gesticulations, speaking in a manner that edifies, and in a moderate tone of voice.

Second Point.

I perceive, O my God, that one of the principal studies of a religious soul should be that of silence; and that if in the schools of the world we learn to speak, in that of religion we should learn to be silent. Ah! I have a thousand times myself experienced, that an hour of silence spent with Thee is worth more than all conversations with creatures. I have always come from useless conversation with my heart empty, my mind dissipated, and my soul in desolation; whereas, I have always come from silence with a heart filled with sweetness and consolation. Ah! how many faults I would have avoided, if I had always been exact in keeping this essential part of my rule! How many discourses of vanity, how many murmurs, falsehoods, and detractions I would have

avoided ! I would now be more recollected, more interior, and more fit for mental prayer. But, by my curiosity to hear and my eagerness to speak, my imagination has been dried up ; I have lost fidelity to grace, recollection, unction, interior strength, exactitude in the observance of the rule, and the relish for God and spiritual things. What completes my unhappy state is, that although convinced of the importance of silence, I have persisted in paying but little attention to it, that I might not give way to those scruples, which I have often despised in others. What a rigorous account wilt Thou demand of me for so many faults, O my God, since Thou wilt judge even the idle words of the simple faithful. What bad example have I not given, what relaxation have I not produced, by so many infractions of my rule ! How many virtues, at least neglected ; how many merits lost ! Into what dissipation have I not fallen, under pretext of necessity of a little relaxation, of infirmity, of sadness, of languor, of dejection, of innocent amusement, of openness of heart ! My eagerness to speak and my curiosity to know, have made me forget the respect I owe Thee, Lord, even at the foot of Thy Altar. Have I not thereby often lost the fruit of my prayers and communions ?

Oh ! how many vices are cut off by silence and how many virtues it causes to be practised ! Grant me, O my God, this gift which contains so many others. Place a guard upon my mouth, and a bridle upon my lips. Be with me when Thou obligest me to be with the world. I will avoid that world as much as I can. The ease with which I gave myself to it has cost me too much. But when there by Thy orders, let me be there under Thy protection. Fill me with Thy Spirit, that the spirit of the world may have no hold on me. Yes, Lord, when there I will not lose sight of Thee, my mind and my heart will turn incessantly towards Thee. I will avoid, according to the advice of my holy founders, conversations too long and too frequent ; frivolous, vain, useless entertainments, incompatible with regularity and recollection, in which if there be no evil, all is at least too dissipating, too sensual. I will cease all those of which curiosity and worldly news are the soul ; wherein familiarity, insensi-

bly glides, mutual respect is lost ; or in which I permit myself too affectionate demonstrations, indiscreet words, or too great outpouring of the heart. I will sanctify the conversations and visits required by propriety, duty, charge or employment. I will limit strictly my entertainments with my directors ; the serious things, of which alone I should speak to them, do not always require long discourses. In the parlor and even in the community, I will take care to turn without affectation the conversation on spiritual matters, to draw from all that presents itself an occasion to speak of God. If those to whom I speak are edified, God will be glorified ; if my pious discourses fatigue them, they will leave me, and I will lose less time. I will moderate my desires for worldly news, and if I learn it without having sought it, I will abstain from repeating it. I will limit my visits, and retire when duty calls me, or when piety, propriety, religion, or charity may suffer from the conversation. I will not fear to be impolite before the world ; on the contrary it will be a subject of edification. In all my communications with creatures, I will remember that I am a religious ; then I shall always appear as a religious. I shall speak as a religious, shall conduct myself as such, so that Jesus Christ, my divine Spouse, will not refuse to acknowledge me or have cause to blush for me. To say all in a word, in all my conversations I will speak only appropriately, after having weighed my words ; I will say nothing, hear nothing, but what reason, conscience and religion permit. I will affect no singularity in my ideas, expressions, or manners ; no obstinacy in my sentiments and pretensions. I will respect virtue, discredit vice, support innocence, excuse the guilty, spare the absent, detest detractors, honor my state, repress liberty, confound calumny, hate dissimulation, avoid censure and raileries, banish equivocation, self-sufficiency and malicious pleasantry ; blush at praise, support injuries, preserve, even in speaking, a deep and sincere love for silence ; finally, I will edify everyone, and entertain myself with God in communicating with creatures.

Support, O Lord, these resolutions, with the assistance of Thy grace. Thou alone, says the prophet, canst stop

and guide my tongue. Grant that I may see the world only in Thy Spirit, and that in my entertainments with it I may not forget what I owe Thee and what I owe myself. Fill my heart with Thy love, that I may think of Thee alone, speak of Thee, and to Thee; in a word, let all my conversations be heavenly and angelic.

SEVENTH DAY.

ENTERTAINMENT.—ON EXACT OBSERVANCE.

“WHOEVER therefore shall break one of these least commandments. . . . he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven.”—Matt. v., 19.

“My dear daughters,” says St. Chantal, “always remember the sentence pronounced by Eternal Wisdom,” ‘He who shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach others to do the same, shall be looked upon as the least in the Kingdom of Heaven.’ Make no difference, therefore, in the practices. Observe them all to the letter and without distinction, and be assured that this fidelity to observances which appear the least and most ordinary, is the most pleasing to God, and draws down His greatest graces.”

Everything will appear great and sublime to a religious in the observance of her rule, if she considers the principle whence they proceed, her sanctification to which they contribute, and the eternal reward which is attached to them.

In their principle they have the Holy Ghost for their author; it was He who inspired them to her holy founders. They are authentic proofs of the authority and power of God over her; inventions of His wisdom, which traced them out for her, as safe ways to conduct her to her last end; testimonies of His goodness which gave them to her, to dispose her to receive His graces; effects of His love which prescribed them to her, as so many bonds to attach and unite her more closely to Him;

effusions of His sanctity which has granted them to her, as means singularly calculated to sanctify her; in fine, they are instruments which His Providence makes use of to accomplish in her His eternal designs, and to elevate her to the degree of glory which He has prepared for her in heaven. This religious soul, therefore, cannot infringe upon those observances, without outraging all the divine perfections. Can she resist what the spirit of God has dictated, without renouncing this holy spirit? Can she reject what His wisdom has established, without contradicting His wisdom? Can she despise what is an effusion of His grace and an efficacious means of becoming holy, without attacking His sanctity? Finally, can she refuse to submit to rules, which are for her the orders, the language, and the virtues of her Creator, without revolting against His power? Besides, these rules contain nothing but what is most perfect and pure in the holy Scriptures. From that source they derive all their strength, all their energy, all their unction, and all their authority. It is from the precepts and counsels of Jesus Christ, the first founder of all religious orders, that they have been taken. Her holy founders have been but His organs. They were but creatures, and might have been mistaken, but the authentic approbation which the Church, by the voice of her pontiffs, has given to their constitutions, is the seal of the divine authority. Therefore, she can no longer doubt that the will of God is clearly and certainly manifested for her. To transgress them, is to attack God Himself, Who is their author, the Church who has approved them, and her holy founders, who are their organs. They traced them out at the foot of the Cross, wrote them after invoking God, and published them after immense labors. The divine Spirit and heavenly unction are perceived in them. Everything is foreseen, everything is wise, everything is proper, everything tends to perfection. They bear the stamp of the power and authority of God; are a ray of His beauty and wisdom, and proceed from Him, as they conduct to Him. They fill the soul who studies them and forms herself by them with sweetness and consolation; they elevate, sanctify and spiritualize her. It is true, that they contradict the senses and combat

effeminacy, but this yoke is that of Jesus Christ. It has nothing painful for love; it is hard and bitter only for the sensual soul. So, the unfaithful soul seeks to throw off the burden under vain pretexts. She often alleges that its observances do not oblige under pain of sin. "But," St. Francis of Sales says, "there are a great many of her rules which she cannot transgress without becoming guilty of mortal, or at least of venial sin, and the transgression of the others is an infidelity if not a sin, and leads eventually to sin. That which is in the rule in form of precept, and which is of divine precept, obliges under pain of sin. That which is ordered as being essential to her profession, and which regards her vows, obliges under pain of sin. That which, is indifferent of itself, if transgressed through contempt, is at least a venial sin. If it be through negligence, and not through contempt, through passion, self-love, disobedience or indifference, she ought to confess it as a venial sin. And if this fault be often repeated, it is more grievous; for this reiteration is a disposition to sin. That which is in her rule, not as of precept, but as of counsel, warning, direction, advice, does not oblige her in conscience, but infidelity on this point leads to sin. She does not sin precisely, because she does an action that is contrary to her constitutions, but, because in the practice, it never happens, perhaps, that this action is exempt from venial sin; because this transgression is always accompanied by circumstances which render her guilty, such as scandalizing the community, introducing relaxation, doing wrong to religion, resisting divine inspiration, quitting the ways of God and not corresponding to His designs."

St. Francis of Sales adds, "that although the constitutions do not bind the Religious of the Visitation under sin, venial or mortal, inasmuch as they are only for direction; nevertheless, she is not guiltless, who by violating them dishonors the things of God, and dissipates the fruits of good example which she should give her neighbor. These rules, besides, although of simple direction, and pure counsel, have God for their author and a religious cannot neglect them without sin. Can the religious soul, without sin, neglect the counsels which the God of majesty

has given her, and which in themselves, are holy, wise and useful.

Has she not promised God, not only at her profession, but many other times in confession, communion, and prayer, to keep her rules in all their integrity; can she then violate them all or in part, and thus fail in her promises without any sin? Has not God a right to say to her: Did you not agree with Me that you would keep your observances, which are the bonds of the alliance I contracted with you? Cannot religion make her the same reproach, saying to her: Did you not promise, when I received you among my children, that you would observe my laws? Without this promise I never would have received you.

Can we resist the will of God, despise His graces, His inspirations, frustrate His designs, and neglect the means of sanctification without sinning? Now, a Religious does all this by violating her rule. By introducing relaxation into Religion by her transgressions, she destroys its most precious treasure, which is the vigor of observance. Is it not a sin to scandalize one's neighbors; can she transgress her rules without scandalizing her sisters? Can she act through passion without offending God? Can she deny that it is passion which causes her deliberately to transgress her rules? Can she act contrary to good order without disorder? Can she do without sin that which leads to the transgression of the vows? The transgression of the rules leads to the transgression of the vows, according to St. Thomas. Often the only difference between the transgression of the rules, and the transgression of the vows consists in *more or less*, as from a lesser disobedience to a greater. Moreover, the transgression of the rules, committed with full deliberation, is necessarily an action good, or bad, or indifferent. We cannot say that it is a good action, for then it would please God and merit a reward in heaven: it is not even indifferent for it cannot be referred to God. What a contradiction it would be, to say: I am going, O Lord, in order to please Thee, to violate the laws Thou hast prescribed me. It must, consequently, be a bad action, and therefore, a sin. Besides, is it not a criminal hypocrisy to deceive the

public by a false show of piety? And does not a Religious make the world believe that she lives according to the rule she has solemnly professed, and of which she wears the habit? If, however, she does not, is she not a hypocrite?

Where is the religious, we may add, who, having often violated her rules, even in things of little consequence, who, when she reenters into herself, does not feel remorse of conscience and confess these things as sins? Where is the wise and enlightened confessor, who, hearing her accuse herself of her deliberate transgressions, tells her that in this she does nothing displeasing to God, that she can, with security of conscience, continue this infidelity which does not prejudice her salvation? Does he not, on the contrary, tell her that she is guilty, that she displeases God; that she will, by her infractions of the rule, oblige Him to withdraw His graces; and that, from often violating her rules, she will come to violate her vows? Finally, does not God often punish the religious who is unfaithful to her rule, by troubles, aridities, interior remorse; by the subtraction of His consolations, his lights and helps, and by considerable faults into which He permits her to fall? These transgressions must, therefore, be a very great evil, since God takes so severe a vengeance upon them. But just as the infraction of the observances is prejudicial to an unfaithful religious, so is their observance salutary and meritorious to the faithful soul. It is the glory, the ornament, the riches, the strength, the beauty and the happiness of a true religious. It communicates to her, says the holy Scripture, true prudence, true greatness of soul; it promises her the delights of heaven and immortal crowns. It unites her, so closely to Jesus Christ, that it makes her become His sanctuary, and the instrument of His glory.

What a happiness! and how easy it is for a daughter of St. Francis of Sales to attain it! Nothing difficult or extraordinary is asked of her. Perhaps the weight of the yoke supplies pretexts for her tepidity; but the only law imposed on her is exactitude to the observances. She is called upon to practise none of the watchings, fasts, disciplines, long offices, and the thousand other practices dreadful to nature, which are used in many religious

orders. On the contrary, her rule is mild, proportioned to human infirmity, and the weak are as capable of fulfilling it, as the strong. The spirit of discretion which dictated it judged, that the lighter the burden, the less those upon whom it was imposed, would seek to modify it; that they would endeavor, on the contrary, to supply for greater sacrifices, by a greater exactitude and fidelity. This is the language of their holy founder. "To be holy," says he, "you have only to keep your rules faithfully and nothing more. With them you will attain perfection and glory; without this fidelity, were you to perform miracles, the Church would never number you among her children. And why? Because, in violating your observances you deviate from the perfection that is proper to you; you fail in an essential obligation; you neglect the sure and infallible means of attaining your last end, and, consequently, you abandon your last end itself, which is your salvation."

It is said by some, that the rule of the Visitation is, indeed, sweet in itself, but that nothing is more austere than its spirit. Its exercises appear of little importance, and this may cause them to be neglected; they are always the same, and this uniformity tires. They finish to-day to begin again to-morrow, and this continuance is fatiguing. They succeed each other without interruption, they fill up every moment; and this is looked upon as an overwhelming servitude. To remove at once these difficulties, very remote from the mind of a true Daughter of the Institute, it will be sufficient to propose the example of Jesus Christ, that perfect model of the religious life, from which we can never deviate, without being lost. Obedience to the laws of His Father was, as it were, the proper and peculiar spirit of our divine Saviour. How small and contemptible these laws might be in appearance; how painful and difficult they might be in effect; how little soever they might oblige, He accomplished them all with equal respect. From His crib to His cross, in all circumstances of His mortal life, He observed the time, the place, the manner, the circumstances of the precept as well as the precept itself. He kept the whole law to an iota. He fulfilled the great things, and never neglected

the small. What reasons caused Him to act thus? The same that should determine the action of a religious soul, viz. :

First. Nothing is little, when it is God who orders it. His will renders everything important. In these words, "Behold what the Lord says to you," Jesus Christ discovered a motive of full and entire submission. A religious should do the same. The splendor of divine authority should eclipse every reason of independence. Whether God speaks to her immediately, or by the voice of her superiors, or by her rule, it matters little; it is enough that He speaks. Subordination requires that she be submissive in everything to Him no matter what He commands or wills. God is certainly good in not giving her absolute commands for that which is most perfect, and for not attaching the same chastisement to an infraction of the least rules as to the greatest. But should not this stimulate her generosity towards Him, and lead her to spare herself so much the less as He spares her more? Do not reason and gratitude require this of her?

Second. Does she not make the observance of little things great, by practising them with great love? Men usually make little account of small services that are rendered them, because they are not very useful to them, neither do they see the heart and the desire that is within it of giving them pleasure. But God, Who on the one hand, has need of nothing, Who knows the good will we have for Him, judges very differently. We always please Him, in proportion to the desire we have of pleasing Him. In this disposition, the religious has even the merit of all the good actions which she does not perform; whereas, she who voluntarily neglects little things, exposes herself to lose the merit of the great and difficult things she may perform.

Third. Great occasions of testifying our love for God rarely present themselves, whereas, little ones are constantly recurring. What a motive for a true religious to be faithful, especially in little things.

Fourth. By being faithful to the least observances, she may be looked upon as weak-minded or scrupulous, but it is great to rise above all human respect.

Fifth. St. Francis of Sales says, that little things are the guard of great duties. Besides, a greater degree of grace and glory is always the reward of a greater exactitude in the least observances. In fine there never can be any littleness in imitating Jesus Christ. He had powerful reasons for doing all that He did. We must, therefore, imitate Him without examining reasons. He obeyed the laws, however unimportant they might appear. A religious should then obey blindly, after His example, as He did, and for the love of Him.

She should employ the greatness of her mind, not in reasoning on her obligations and in making them, by her subtilities, almost nothing, but in seeking each day, new motives to render her duties precious and venerable. She will become great in virtue only by neglecting nothing that is little. Her predestination, perfection and salvation are, perhaps, attached to this trifle which she knows not, and which she cannot discern from the rest.

My observances, you say, are painful and difficult by their continuation. That is to say everything is an obstacle for an unfaithful soul. She violates her lesser duties through a pretended strength of mind, and the greater, through lack of courage. She believes herself too far above the one, and too much beneath the other. She wishes to do only what is of consequence, provided it is easy; or rather she wishes to do nothing, or almost nothing for Jesus Christ, Who did everything for her when there was question of meriting her salvation. Whence comes such baseness in this soul? Can she distrust grace, and fear that God will fail her, when it is He who commands? He has given her His own example, which cost Him so much, because He judged it necessary, to keep her in the practice of good; will He then refuse her the grace which she needs, and without which she can do nothing? A little fidelity and mountains will be removed from her path.

The rules should be kept, no matter how little they seem to oblige. Jesus Christ was not obliged to one thing more than to another; but the glory of God and the will of His Father always held the place of precept. Let there be no excuses, no dispensations from the letter

of the rule for a Daughter of the Visitation. She is indeed far from perfection, she has not even made the first advance towards it, and surely she will never reach it, whilst she distinguishes counsel from precept. Besides, she will often be deceived. Nor is it possible that she meet any other fate; infidelity and reserve always merit the coldness of God. And where would she be if Jesus Christ had done only what He was obliged to do? What did He strictly owe her, or what would become of her, if now, He only gave her the graces He owes her? This He may do, even if He sees her seeking so many exemptions, modifications, reliefs, and dispensations.

Let her, then, apply herself to tighten her chains rather than to loose them. It is slavery to serve only when commanded. Let her rejoice that the law leaves something to her generosity and free will. The Rule, she says, does not oblige under pain of sin. For that very reason she should endeavor to keep it better. Her superior does not see her; she may commit faults with impunity, therefore, she should restrain herself the more. God sees her, and she should delight in being faithful to Him, when she has only His eye for her witness. She should even regret that her fidelity draws on her such great rewards, and that she cannot say, that she serves God for God alone. Finally, she should always observe this precious maxim of her holy foundress: "Have much at heart, punctuality in the observance. But this punctuality should be gay, affectionate, unrestrained, proceeding from the interior. Observe your rules through divine love; let it be through love that you keep silence, that you receive humiliations, that you are careful in the observance, that you do not omit a point. In a word, let divine love be in everything, your motive and aim."

EIGHTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.—ON HUMILITY OF HEART.

First Point.

“LEARN of Me because I am meek and humble of Heart.”—St. Matt. xi., 29.

“It is this humility, my dear daughters,” says St. Francis of Sales, “which forms religious discipline. It is the foundation of the spiritual edifice, and the infallible mark of the children of Jesus Christ. Therefore, you should pay particular attention to it, performing all your actions in a spirit of profound, sincere and unfeigned humility. This virtue well practised will lead you to the exercise of a humility unknown to the vulgar, and you will become so low in your nothingness as to disappear from your own eyes, as well as from those of the world. It is so much your spirit to seek lowliness, and to shun all display, that, if you were to fail in this, you would lose your treasure and be no longer Daughters of the Visitation. Your congregation will produce its branches and fruit, only in proportion as its root will be sunk in the love of lowliness and abjection. Walk, therefore, generously through these low valleys, gathering at the foot of the Cross this love of humility, since God esteemed it so much, that He left for a time the exercise of royalty, humbling Himself to the opprobrium of the Cross, to teach us to practice the evangelical maxims, and you, in particular, those of your Institute. If you can be useful to His glory, laboring at any work whatever, even in creating other congregations of servants of God, without ever establishing yourselves, you would only be more agreeable to His divine Majesty, practising by this means humility in a sovereign degree.”

What can be added to these words of our holy founder, that true apostle of humility? They are words which should be deeply engraven on the hearts of his daughters. In these maxims, which are so many oracles of the Holy Ghost, a

Religious of the Visitation can but remark, that the virtue of humility which is required of her consists not simply in acknowledging before God that she is nothing, that she has nothing but poverty and misery, that she can do nothing but sin. But she must also have an habitual view of her baseness, she must take pleasure in it, despising herself interiorly, being in a continual disposition of confusion in her own eyes, being delighted to see that she is nothing of herself, and that God is everything. She must seek for, and even wish others to entertain the same sentiments of her nothingness, and to despise her interiorly. Knowing herself to be unworthy of their esteem, far from seeking it, or wishing for it, she should reject it as an injustice, desiring that all glory be referred to God, because He alone deserves to be loved, praised, and glorified. Moreover, she should desire, that all men act in her regard conformably to their sentiments, and that, despising her interiorly, they testify their contempt by their actions, that they humble her, that they cover her with contempt and opprobrium. Far from being afflicted at this, she should rejoice that justice is done her, and that she is treated as she deserves. She should receive humiliations with real joy, not only because they are more proper for her, but also because they furnish her with the means of testifying to God her love, by sacrificing to Him those things dearest to her, her glory and honor. But above all, she should rejoice at humiliations, because they make her conformable to Jesus Christ, humbled and contemned, in which things a true Daughter of the Visitation finds all her happiness.

How exalted, how sublime, how perfect is the idea of such profound humility ! Is not a Daughter of St. Francis of Sales called to the highest perfection of humility by being required to do all things in a spirit of profound and sincere humility ? Does not her holy founder tell her to remember that all her splendor consists in having none ? Does not her rule oblige her to keep herself in her littleness ? Do not her founders say to her : “ You are called to the highest perfection that can be attained here below, for the very reason that your Institute obliges you to the most profound humility and the most perfect annihili-

lation of self?" St. Chantal says, that the virtue of a Daughter of the Visitation consists in this, that when she is humbled, she humbles herself still more; that when she is accused, she accuses herself still more; that when she is employed in low things, she acknowledges that it is above her merits, that, when she is cast off, she rejoices at it. "A Daughter of the Visitation," she adds, "could not give a greater mark of incapacity, than to believe that she possesses talent. This is contrary to humility, which should make us consider ourselves useless servants, and if we knew the humility that God requires of a sister of the Visitation, and how those souls who exalt themselves and make a vain parade act directly contrary to the Spirit of God, we would ask that the fire of heaven might consume us. "Yes," continues our holy Mother, "we ought to be perfectly humble. The general of our order is humility. I would wish to engrave this maxim with my blood, and, if it be observed, the spirit of the Institute will be maintained in union and conformity. Would to God that the lips of the daughters of this congregation were pierced with a red-hot iron, and forever closed to the least word contrary to humility! Nothing could be more capable of shortening my days than to see vanity among them. Let us, therefore, I entreat you, my dear sisters, have at heart the practice of this holy humility. Let us not rejoice at the favorable reception given to our Institute, but rather humble ourselves on account of it and glorify God. To be a true Daughter of Holy Mary is to despise honor, and esteem contempt. Without solid humility, there is nothing but the shadow of virtue. Blessed is the soul that humbles herself before God and accuses herself before creatures! She will infallibly regain what she has lost by her fault. Humility of heart, submission of will and judgment should be the foundation of our perfection; this is our true spirit. These virtues are the life and soul of our order. Let not, then, a Daughter of the Visitation desire to be loved and esteemed by men; let her regard herself as beneath all; let her not be pained, but sincerely rejoice, when others are preferred to her. Let her desire, not her personal convenience, but the common good alone. Let her yield without difficulty to

her equals and even to her inferiors. Let her rejoice to see herself blamed and disapproved, sincerely condemning herself, since there is always in all we do much imperfection. Let her love to be considered as useless in the monastery, and to be employed only in low things and humiliating offices. Let her never excuse herself in great or little things, always receiving well the admonitions given her and rejoicing at being accused, not only of her defects, but also of things of which she does not feel herself guilty. Let her suffer such things cheerfully in imitation of Jesus Christ, in the opprobriums and ignominies that He endured. Let her enter into the spirit of that profound humility, which made Him say, by the mouth of the prophet: 'I am a worm and no man, the reproach of men and the outcast of the people.' In imitation of this great example, should not a religious seek to abase herself continually? Ought not her only endeavor be to humble herself completely?" "It was for this reason," says our holy Foundress, "that our blessed Father has established in his Order the daily practice of the accusation of the faults and failings of His daughters, which should be inviolably observed. Yet this would be but illusion and hypocrisy, if each sister were not sincerely disposed to receive corrections, confusions, humiliations and other painful things, not simply by way of trial or tribulation, sent by God, but as chastisements that she deserves for her sins, and remedies necessary to cure her pride, never desiring in this or in anything else, those privileges, which in some orders are given to the old sisters, but to which our holy Father had a great aversion" "A Daughter of the Institute should keep herself continually in this true and sincere humility of heart. When the world despises her, she should receive this contempt as most suitable to her state, and as a precious token of God's love for her, since he always regards with a favorable eye the soul who sincerely desires to be contemned by men. Humiliation willingly accepted is a most agreeable sacrifice to Him." "Her principal care should be to humble and abase herself in every thing, without ever desiring to appear or to excel, either in what relates to herself personally, or to the community generally, keeping

herself hidden in peace in the shadow of her own lowliness and abjection, wishing to appear only in this manner, or rather, not wishing to appear even in this way, finding her repose and happiness in the despising of herself, not forgetting that she is of the last order in the Church, and that, being the least and most useless servant in the house of God, she should love to be regarded and treated conformably to what she is in reality."

"She should," continues St. Francis of Sales, "be humble in mind and heart. Humble in mind, that is, she should see everywhere her poverty, misery and baseness, being intimately persuaded that she is of herself, but nothingness,—the nothingness of nature and of sin, the nothingness of weakness and incapacity for good. Humble in heart, she should cherish her own abjection, willingly suffering to be forgotten, neglected, despised and abased, and what is still more insupportable to self-love, to be contemptible.

. She should, moreover, according to the principles of true humility, bear with herself, without sadness or discouragement, resting peacefully, sweetly and constantly, on the bosom of God, Who will not permit her to perform an action to attract praise, or to omit any through fear of being esteemed. The love of abjection is the root of peace and joy. True humility shuns offices, but it is not obstinate in refusing them; it does not stop at its own unworthiness: whenever it sees the command, it is satisfied to be submissive to the will of God, and to undertake all that superiors direct."

What perfection, what greatness, in these different precepts of my holy founders! But have I practised them?

Second Point.

I have renounced the pomp and glory of the world, the pride of life; I am the Spouse of an humble God; I wear the habit of humility; but am I the more humble on that account? Have I less desire of being exalted? Am I less sensitive to the humiliations that happen to me? less sensitive to the slightest scoldings? less jealous of certain preferences and distinctions. Does the spirit of humility vivify my works? animate my actions? Does not a fund

of self-love taint my whole conduct? My pride, perhaps, is not a visible or gross pride, but am I not ruled by that more delicate and subtle pride, which consists sometimes in a sweet complacency in my own merit, in my talents, even in my apparent virtues; sometimes in an interior contempt for others; sometimes in a little remote view of my own elevation, or of drawing to myself the esteem of creatures? Do not a thousand thoughts of vanity creep even into the practice of humility? I abase, I despise myself and praise others, but do I not seek to draw glory from all these things? How many times have I not artfully drawn glory from little humiliations? blamed myself that I might be justified? censured my faults, that others might take my part? spoken badly of myself that others might speak well of me? Have I not interiorly preferred myself in virtue to the persons with whom I am associated? Have I not rejoiced when their faults were known, that I might appear better in comparison with them? Have I not maliciously told their faults to those who were unacquainted with them? Have I not taken vanity sometimes from my birth, sometimes from the wealth, offices, or alliances of my family? from the advantages I had in the world? from the distinction of persons who visited me? from my talents, employments, knowledge, or abilities? from my personal deportment, my mind and my merit? What is there in me so much to be appreciated? What is there in me that is not hateful and worthy of contempt even in my own eyes? My mind which so often leads me to the vain esteem of myself, whose productions I idolize, whose thoughts I so conceitedly prefer to those of others, is but ignorance, levity, error, and false prejudices; it is full of darkness, yet dares to glory in a supposed light! My body is but a mass of rottenness; its origin is the slime of the earth, and its end is corruption and worms! My heart is an abyss of misery, weakness, and contradiction! My soul is torn by an infinity of passions; of which it is the slave. My conscience is burdened with a multitude of sins. My will is a blind power, having only a propensity to evil. All in me unites in saying: "Dust and ashes, vessel of infirmities, sinner, why do you glory in yourself? Of what are you proud? Subject

to sin by the natural weight of your nothingness, guilty of faults and of innumerable and voluntary relapses ; already a thousand times condemned for your crimes to the eternal flames of hell, and, perhaps, on the point of being cast therein ; what should nourish pride and self-love in you ? Does nothingness merit any thing, and is not sin worthy of contempt, confusion and chastisement ? If you could see yourself as you really are, if you could feel all the greatness of your wounds, sound their depths, discover the horrible stains and the misery to which your soul is reduced before God, instead of being vain, you could hardly support yourself, and without an extraordinary assistance from heaven, you would yield to despair. Your whole life has been, on the part of God but a constant flow of benefits, and on your side, a succession of revolts against Him ; a series of graces and of crimes. Perhaps, you have never performed a single action properly. The corruption of your nature and of your heart have been so great, that your best actions have been lost, owing to their many defects and imperfections. How, then, can you conceive sentiments of complacency in yourself ? Should not whatever talents you may possess, far from exciting your vanity, call forth your tears for the abuse you have made of them ? Besides, does not all the glory of them belong to God ? True talents and qualifications are those of grace ; possessing them, do you not unceasingly abuse them ? What reason, then, have you to be proud or to attribute any merit to yourself."

Ah, Lord, I perceive with shame that I am only weakness and corruption in my body, only darkness and ignorance in my soul. I am a compound of misery and nothingness, yes, a proud, arrogant nothingness. I will labor to convince myself more and more of this truth, in order to humble and despise myself, and to suffer others to despise and humble me. I have hitherto thought that in humbling myself, or in suffering others to humble and despise me, I was doing a work of supererogation. I even thought it would be doing Thee an injury, O my divine Saviour, if I did not acknowledge Thy gifts in me, and let them be known and honored by others. How great was my error, O my God ! I detest it, and fully convinced that I deserve only

contempt, opprobriums, and chastisements, I will look upon myself as the greatest sinner in the world. I will see in myself only my iniquities, in others only their virtues. Should I have more mind, more talent than my sisters, for this it is which has so often made me proud, I will say to myself that it is God who has distributed to each what He pleases. If they are better endowed, I should only be the more grateful. If my gifts are dangerous, I should be the more circumspect. I am sinful and more sinful than others, and, for this reason, I should humble myself more than my sisters, and even be humbled by them, because God directs the instruments He is pleased to choose. He permits such things that I may acquit myself of my debts.

The state that I have embraced is without doubt, the most perfect. But far from inspiring me with pride, it should cause me greater fear. "A married women," says St. Bernard, "is inferior to a virgin, but a proud virgin is inferior to her who is humble in the married state." Virginity is laudable, but humility is necessary. One is a counsel, the other a command. I might have been saved without poverty, chastity and obedience, but I cannot be saved without humility. Moreover, without this virtue, it is impossible for me to accomplish my vows, since humility is itself poverty of spirit, the guardian of my chastity and the faithful companion of my obedience. Besides, the peculiar characteristic of my institute is the most perfect humility. Therefore, I can render solid glory to God and sanctify myself only by the practice of this virtue. In vain would I wish to glorify God by laboring, suffering and even dying for His glory and His name. My labors, sufferings, and death would be in His sight only new outrages, if not accompanied, enhanced, and purified by true humility.

Enlighten me more and more, O my God, by Thy grace ! Divine model of a virtue which I have so little practised, do Thou inspire me with the resolutions which are necessary for me, and which, by Thy grace, I hope to keep.

I will suffer all, and from all without complaining, justifying or excusing myself. Advice, contempt, correction, offences real or pretended committed against me, I will look upon in the order of Thy Providence, as aids to

humble myself. Shouldst Thou, O Lord, make me a butt for the outrages of all creatures; should Thou even cast me into hell, under the feet of the demons; all this I will consider too little, for my sins merit much more.

I will no longer aspire to honors, esteem, or praise, because I do not merit them. I will embrace with good heart, contempt, confusion, and bad treatment, because I merit them, and because it is impossible for creatures to make me suffer all that is my due, since there can be no proportion between the enormity of my sins, which is infinite, and the pains which creatures can inflict, which are always finite.

No matter what mind, talent, merit, address, perfection, or quality, I may possess, I will be far from esteeming or preferring myself to others, on this account. I will think of the terrible account I must render Thee, my God, for the bad use I have made of them, which will, perhaps, cause my damnation. In imitation of my holy Mother, I will be very exact about saying anything that will attract to me glory and esteem. I will never speak either good or evil of myself, for fear, if I say what is good I may appear holy, and if I say what is evil, I may appear humble.

I will never speak badly of those who may be preferred to me, because, in my heart, I believe that justice is rendered to others, and that I am the last of all.

I will always place myself beneath my neighbor, considering Jesus Christ, and His merits in her. I will say to myself incessantly, that there is no one who does not possess a thousand good qualities, which I do not, and who is not exempt from a thousand defects, which I have. I will place myself beneath those who appear even as nothing. I will be pleased to see them exalted above me, more considered, more honored, more esteemed, more loved, more distinguished, and applauded.

Far from eagerly disputing, or contesting about employments, I will choose, if possible, the most humiliating occupations, the lowest, most abject, most hidden, most unknown offices, considering myself as a useless servant. Rather, I will always keep myself near my superior, to do whatever she may require. If she gives me some marks of esteem and distinction, I will renounce the

secret joy which nature feels. If I am raised to the first charges, I will be afflicted, I will sigh before God, fearing that this may be the recompense of the little good I have done, and a cause of loss to me. I will regard glory and the esteem of creatures, as a sweet poison, which, swelling the heart, often causes death ; as a sovereign evil, which, on one side, nearly always destroys the merit of good actions, and, on the other, places almost invincible obstacles to salvation and perfection.

I will everywhere persecute my pride as my deadliest enemy. I will declare and carry on against it open and continual war. I will work its destruction on all occasions. I will make neither peace nor truce with it. I will consider as my best friends, those who, by their contempt, put weapons in my hand to destroy it. I will love to be corrected and reprehended, not only by my superiors, but by my equals and inferiors. If my faults are made known, I will not seek to discover the author. I will not complain or be displeased ; on the contrary, I will be thankful for the correction. I will not seek to justify myself, I will not solicit any one to take my part, or defend me.

I will often ask Thee, O my God, as did our holy mother and St. Francis of Sales, to aid me to humble myself. I will often go to Thee, as the prodigal went to his father, but in a different spirit. I will ask Thee to give me the portion that belongs to me, that is to say, nothingness and confusion. This is what is mine, and what I will take on all occasions as my portion, leaving to Thee, O Lord, all the glory, honor and praise, which are merited by the good you have placed in me, and which You may do by me. I will take, as Thou didst order the workman in the Gospel to do, what is mine, that is shame and confusion, which are due to my sins. In this state of humiliation, which belongs to me, I will be diffident of all my dispositions and actions. In a word, I will be humble in my thoughts, affections, words, conduct, manners, walk, deportment, and even in the tone of my voice.

Finally, Lord, Thou findest Thy happiness in the contemplation of Thy greatness. I will find mine in the contemplation of my miseries. Thou dwellest in heaven ; I will abide in the abyss of my own nothingness. I will

try to bury myself therein more and more, to feel and penetrate more fully its depths.' I wish no other place; it is the only one that belongs to me, and in which I will find peace and repose, because descending to me, in proportion as I abase myself before Thee, Thou wilt fill the void which humility has made in my heart; and Thou wilt give Thyself to me to be my inheritance and possession.

EIGHTH DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.—ON MEEKNESS.

First Point.

"Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart."—Matt. xi., 29.

One of the principal fruits of humility is meekness, that meekness of spirit of which Jesus Christ is at the same time the Master and the Model. This meekness is not the effect of a weak and insensible temperament, nor the portion of a languid soul, who, not being able to signalize herself by generous actions, seeks some glory in the exercise of a timid virtue. No, true meekness is not that softness, which, through humor and weakness, yields to others in dangerous matters. It is not that vacillation of mind, which makes us follow without choice and discernment all the inclinations of others, or blindly approve their passions. It is not that mean complaisance, which servilely subjects us to the will, or caprices of those from whom we have something to hope or fear. Nor is it the action of a skilful and accommodating mind, which pleases all sorts of persons through motives which are merely human, conforms to everything, artfully distributes caresses, flatteries, applauses, and praises, or which, more touched by its reputation and the esteem of others, than by the injuries it receives, skilfully conceals the resentments which it interiorly feels. Still less is it that feigned and politic moderation which, for a time dissembles

injuries that it may more surely avenge them when possible. True meekness has humility for its principle, the love of God for its support, and heaven for its reward. The meekness of Jesus Christ and, consequently, that of a religious, has pure and supernatural motives. It proceeds from the heart, which through a movement of charity, stifles all resentments at their birth. It is a virtue which appeases every violent sally, which regulates all the movements, looks, words, gestures, and turbulent emotions of the soul. "It is an immutable state of mind," says St. Francis of Sales, which renders the soul always the same in honor or contempt, which makes her suffer quietly the troubles and displeasures caused by her neighbor. It leads her to pray sincerely for her neighbor when suffering injustice from her—when she acts unjustly towards her. This virtue removes all harshness from her actions, for, if wisdom is the salt that should preserve them from corruption, meekness is the honey that should correct their bitterness."

Thus, a true religious is meek through virtue. She supports pains without alarms, and contempt without chagrin. She obeys without constraint, accommodates herself to all sorts of humors, and resists nothing but sin. She is condescending without meanness, ready to endure everything, and to do good to everyone. She sacrifices everything to peace, and never yields with more pleasure than when she thinks she has most right to sustain her judgment. No harsh words ever escape her, she controls no one nor does she contradict, lest she should give rise to disputes. Her humors, manners, looks, discourses, tone of voice, everything breathes the meekness of Jesus Christ, her divine Model. She is a dove without gall, she knows not how to return evil for evil, she avenges herself only by benefits, and it is as natural for her to love her enemies, as it is for an angry man to hate them. Like a rock, which raised above the sea breaks the waves that dash against it, she opposes herself to the torrent of natural inclinations, and remains firm and immovable in the midst of the most violent agitations. Fixed in our Lord, Who is her support, she rules her passions, without being troubled by them. What disturbs others only

serves to establish and strengthen her composure. Her occupations are without embarrassment, her labor without eagerness, her cares without emotion, her desires without disquietude. Her mind, partaking in some sort of the condition of the superior intelligences, sees, without being moved, the turmoil of sensible things. Her soul, as a region elevated above the storm, is always in an unalterable tranquility, and this constant equality, which is to the mind what a perfectly healthy temperament is to the body, diffuses over her countenance a serene air, which shows that profound peace reigns within her soul.

But meekness does not consist in simply repressing those exterior marks, which disfigure the noble traits that God has stamped upon us, as the animated characters of His own image and likeness. Its principal application is to labor within, and to regulate the movements of the heart. The most just soul is sometimes attacked by mutinous passions, and especially by a tyrannical anger. She often becomes the theatre of a civil war, which arms all her powers against her, and excites within her trouble, disorder, and horrible confusion. In such times what is the effect of meekness? It commands the winds and the storm to be appeased, it restores calm, communicates to the soul the most unalterable patience, gives it a strength that nothing can shake, a moderation, which enables it to triumph over the sallies of nature and the tumultuous emotions of the passions.

In this consists the true character of evangelical meekness. A religious, therefore, should not be satisfied with a tranquil and regular exterior. Her soul should be peaceful and moderate. In vain is the sea calm on its shores, if agitated in its centre. In vain would the exterior appear meek, if the interior be agitated. Far from a religious this hypocrisy, which cries, "Peace, peace!" when there is no peace; which, under a vain show of meekness, yields to deliberate resentment; which, by an artful dissimulation, suffers with apparent tranquility the injury it has received, while the remembrance of it is the more deeply engraved therein, by the silence and feigned moderation, which stifle all exterior marks of it! "The commencement of the victory," says St.

Francis of Sales, "is without doubt the silence of the tongue, but the silence of the heart is the progress and perfection of this victory; it is a stable and constant serenity of soul in the midst of the impetuous movements which corrupt nature excites, like so many impure winds."

Therefore, according to this holy bishop, to feel the passions which the heat of blood excites in us, to suffer only the first sallies which act more quickly than reason, is to begin, and even advance in the practice of meekness. But to know how to extinguish the fire of anger and to stifle it at its birth, to remain firm and quiet, never wavering, when we see everything around us change, not to be troubled by the vivacity of our inclinations, to move them and to be unmoved by them, to reign imperiously over ourselves, to be insensible to passing events, not by virtue of a happy temperament, but by the help of Christian vigilance, by the force of grace and the motive of the love of God and our neighbor; this is to have attained a sublime degree of the true meekness of spirit, which our divine Saviour requires of us. This, our holy founder, himself, attained. After a thousand combats against his passions, after a thousand victories over anger which was natural to him, he at length found himself established in so profound a peace that nothing was capable of troubling it. From whom had he obtained that peace which crowned him with so much glory? From Jesus Christ, Who is its Master, Model, and Motive.

Second Point.

Thou art not only meek, O my divine Saviour, but Thou art meekness and goodness itself! Severity is foreign to Thy nature, and Thou showest Thyself merciful even in Thy anger! Thou punishest the wicked only to recall them to Thee! Thou chastisest as a Father, and Thy mercy extends over all Thy works! Thou makest Thy thunder roll over our heads, only to rouse us from our torpor, and to give us a still more sensible proof of Thy love! Thou hast become like unto us! Thou hast tempered the rays of Thy majesty and glory

by the shades of Thy mortality! How many traits of Thy amiable meekness are there not in the course of Thy life upon earth! On coming into the world, Thou didst not cause Thyself to be called Judge, Master, God of armies, God of vengeance, but wast pleased to be called Father, Spouse, Good Shepherd, Lamb, God of all consolation, Prince of peace,—names of honeyed sweetness! Thou didst take the form of an infant, symbol of meekness! Thou wast not, as Isaiah had announced: “sad or troublesome!” Thou didst not contest, nor was Thy voice heard abroad! The bruised reed Thou didst not break and the smoking flax Thou didst not quench! (Is. xlii. 2. 3. 4.) It seems as if Thou didst choose coarse and ignorant disciples purposely to exercise Thy patience and meekness. And with what goodness Thou didst support their weaknesses! With what condescension didst Thou accommodate Thyself to their minds, characters and defects! When Thou didst reprove them, was it not always with much kindness? Although they sometimes understood so little the great maxims Thou didst teach them, although they profited so badly by Thy example, didst Thou show them any displeasure on that account? Didst Thou appear to be wearied with their conduct? James and John wished, through a spirit of rigor, that Thou wouldst cause fire from heaven to descend upon the city of Samaria, to punish its abduracy and ingratitude. With what meekness didst Thou not check their bitter zeal, saying: “You know not of what spirit you are!”

Although Thou hadst an infinite horror of sin, Thou hadst not less goodness for sinners. Never didst Thou reject one. Thou didst even seek them with eagerness! Thou didst receive them with infinite goodness, converse and even eat with them so familiarly, that the Pharisees reproached Thee on that account! Thou didst pardon the guilty, condemned by their own crimes; an adulteress confused and humbled found forgiveness in Thy sight, and Thou didst employ all the wisdom of a God to withdraw her from the severity of the law, and from her captious accusers! How great was Thy condescension towards the Samaritan Woman! How great Thy mercies to Magdalene! With what eagerness didst Thou seek all

those who, by their infidelities, had withdrawn from Thee, to lead them back to the paths of justice ! If Thou didst reprehend with zeal the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, hadst Thou not great regard for their persons, and didst Thou not order that their doctrine should be believed, and submission shown to their orders ! If Thou didst appear angry against the profaners of the Temple, was it not that they might understand the greatness of their crime, and recover from their blindness ! Thou didst defend Thyself from the calumnies and persecutions of Thy enemies only by silence and by flight. In fine, to crown Thy life by acts of incomparable meekness, in the midst of the outrages with which Thou wast loaded, of the opprobriums which were heaped upon Thee, of the thousand torments which Thy enemies made Thee suffer, as a meek and patient lamb, according to the prophet, or as an innocent sheep led to the slaughter, a victim of Thy goodness and charity, Thou didst not open Thy mouth to utter any complaint ! By Thy silence and patience, Thou didst astonish Thy enemies and Thy executioners. When the ungrateful and deicide Jews had attached Thee to the infamous Cross, Thou didst raise Thy voice to conjure Thy Father to pardon them, to forgive their heinous crime ! Astonishing examples, which persuade me more efficaciously than the most eloquent and pathetic discourses !

After this, is it not with justice, O my Saviour, that Thou sayest to me, "Learn of Me because I am meek !" What light in these admirable words ! words which contain the example that charms, and the law that commands ! What an obligation for me to conform to Thee in the practice of Thy amiable meekness. O divine Jesus ! I may say to Thee with St. Augustine, when, at the beginning of the world, Thou didst create Heaven and earth ; when, by Thy infinite wisdom, Thou didst establish in nature that admirable order, which, with so much splendor, publishes Thy greatness ; when, by Thy omnipotence, Thou didst draw from nothingness this great universe ; when, to manifest Thy glory, Thou didst deliver Thy chosen people from cruel captivity, by opening to them a dry path through the sea ; when, in the fulness of time, clothed with our nature, Thou didst raise the dead to life,

unbind the tongues of the dumb, restore sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, didst cure lepers and revive the withered limbs of paralytics, Thou didst not propose Thyself to me as a Model. But when shorn, so to say, of Thy strength, Thou didst practice meekness of spirit, it was then, that Thou didst give Thyself to me as my Model! It would seem, as though Thou didst produce all the oracles of Thy wisdom to teach me that Thou art meek! What powerful motives to lead me to imitate Thy amiable meekness, which is the foundation of evangelical doctrine and its distinctive spirit! I will, O Jesus, make every effort to acquire this great virtue, which is especially that of my Institute! I will apply myself to moderate and repress the eagerness and excess of anger, interior or exterior, to which my heart is naturally inclined. I will unceasingly watch over myself to overcome my vivacity. I will suffer tranquilly the afflictions, disgraces, and troubles, which come to me from Thee. I will adore with respect, and without complaint all the dispositions of Thy justice in my regard. From my neighbor, I will endure injustice and contempt without chagrin, bitterness, or murmur. I will have tender compassion for her weakness, charitable indulgence for her defects. I will be meek and obliging towards all. I will avoid disputes and contentions, and prevent them; when possible. I will maintain my opinion without haughtiness and obstinacy, so as to show that it is less through attachment to my own ideas, or contempt for those of others, than through zeal for truth, which I will never defend at the expense of charity.

Adorable Saviour, Who, by Thy words and example, hast taught me meekness of spirit, add to Thy divine lesson the strength and unction of Thy grace, to make me love it! Take from me, Lord, this heart of stone! Give me one of flesh, whereon, according to Thy promise, Thou wilt engrave deeply the law of meekness with the ineffaceable characters of love! Favor me with the benedictions of Thy goodness, and grant that I may be of the number of those, who will possess the recompense promised to the meek and peaceful of heart!

EIGHTH DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION ON MUTUAL LOVE.

First Point.

“HE that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law.”—(Romans, xiii., 8.)

“As charity,” says St. Francis of Sales, “is for a christian the foundation, the principle and the end of the whole law, so for a Daughter of the Visitation, the whole spirit of her Order is reduced to the most solid practice of mutual love. She should have but one heart and one soul with all those to whom she is united by the same vocation. It is by keeping herself always in this intimate union, that she will correspond to the end for which she came into the convent. And it is by her exactitude in practising all that can nourish and perfect this unity of spirit, that she will receive abundantly the effect of that admirable prayer, which Jesus Christ, before His passion, made to His Father, asking, that as His Father is in Him and He in His Father, we should be united in Him and all become, as it were, one.”

“All the good of our Institute,” said St. Chantal, “depends upon union. This precept of charity and mutual love is what I desire should remain in our congregation above all that I have said good during my life.” My heart,” added she, “would wither with sorrow, if I foresaw that charity would not be eternal in the Visitation.”

“But,” resumes St. Francis of Sales, “in what does this mutual love consist, with which our sisters should love each other?” “Mutual love,” continues he, “is the essence of true and sincere friendship, which can exist only between reasonable persons, who nourish it through the medium of reason. Otherwise, it cannot be mutual, and is only passion. Thus, the greater part of the friendships formed by men not having a good end, and not being governed by reason, do not deserve the name of mutual love. Moreover, besides the medium of reason, there must be a certain

correspondence of vocation, claims and qualities between those who form a friendship. Experience clearly teaches this. For, is it not true, that there is no friendship truer and stronger than which exists between brothers and sisters? We do not call the love that children have for their parents friendship, because it has not this correspondence of which we speak. The love of parents is a majestic love, full of authority, and that of children for their parents is a love of respect and submission. But the love of brothers, on account of the similarity of their condition, is a firm and solid friendship. Therefore, the christians of the primitive church were all called brothers. When this fervor among the generality of christians grew cold, religious orders were instituted, in which it was ordained that all should call each other brother or sister, as a mark of the sincere, true and cordial friendship which they should bear to each other."

"I say cordial friendship," says the holy bishop, "because it ought to have its foundation in the heart. That is, we should not be satisfied with loving our sisters as ourselves, as the commandment of God obliges, but we should love them more than ourselves, to observe the rules of perfection which require this. Our Lord has said: 'Love one another, as I have loved you.' This demands our attention. 'Love one another, as I have loved you.' This means more than ourselves, for our Lord preferred us to Himself in all things, especially when we receive Him in holy Communion; so it is His Will that we have a similar love for each other. As He did everything for us that He could possibly do, so He requires that we do everything for our neighbor, except to risk our salvation by sin. With this exception, our love should be so firm, cordial and solid, that we should never refuse to do or suffer anything for our neighbor and our sisters."

"Now, this cordial love should be accompanied with two virtues, affability and good conversation. Affability diffuses a certain sweetness over those serious communications that we sometimes have with each other. Good conversation renders us agreeable and gracious in the recreations and in less serious communications. Affability keeps a just medium between too much and too

little. On the one hand, it excludes too great seriousness, and on the other, too much softness in caressing and saying frequent words that tend to flattery. The virtue of conversation requires that we contribute to a holy and moderate joy, and to gracious entertainments, which may serve to console and recreate our neighbor, so that we do not weary her by too grave and melancholy a demeanor, or refuse to recreate in the time destined for it."

"In a word, if we are not always naturally sweet and agreeable, we must nevertheless love our neighbor with our whole heart, and as our Lord has loved us,—that is, more than ourselves, always preferring her to ourselves in the order of holy charity, and never refusing anything we can do to contribute to her welfare, except our eternal loss . . . We must procure her all the good we can for soul and body, praying for her and serving her cordially when the occasion presents itself. The friendship which consists in fine words is not worth much; this is not to love as our Lord loved us. He was not contented with assuring us that He loved us, but went further by doing all He has done to prove His love."

"St. Paul, speaking to his spiritual children, says 'I am ready to give my life for you, and to be employed in such a manner, as to testify how dearly and tenderly I love you.' Yes, he meant to say, I am ready to let them do with me whatever they please for your sake. In this, he teaches us that to employ ourselves, and even to give our life for our neighbor is not so much, as to be employed at the pleasure of others, for their sake. He had learned this from our sweet Saviour, and it is to this degree of the love of our neighbor that we are called. For, it is not enough to assist our neighbor, in things which are easy to us, nor is it enough to employ our own person to suffer for her sake, we must go still farther, letting ourselves be employed for her by holy obedience, and by her as she shall please, without ever resisting. I always mean in that which is not contrary to God and does not offend Him."

"Let us, therefore, love one another, and let us use this pressing motive: our Lord on the Cross shed even the last drop of His blood on the earth, as if to make a holy

cement, with which to unite and attach all the stones of His Church, which are the faithful, that this union might be strong, and that there never should be any division, so much did He fear that disunion would lead to eternal damnation."

"Bearing with the imperfections of our neighbor is one of the principles of this love. Our Lord on the Cross gave us an ineffable example of this. He excused those who with barbarous cruelty were outraging and crucifying Him. He even sought reasons to make His Father pardon them in the very act of the sin and injury."

"We must also remark," continues our holy founder, "that mutual love is attached to a virtue, which is, as it were, dependent on this love. This is a childlike confidence, which makes the sisters communicate to one another their little graces and consolations, and not fear that their imperfections should be remarked. I do not say, that if some one had an extraordinary gift from God, it should be told to every one. No, but as to our little graces and consolations, I wish that we should not be reserved, but when occasions present themselves, communicate them simply and freely to each other, not by way of boasting, but in simple confidence. As to our faults, we should not take pains to conceal them. On the contrary, we should be very glad that we are recognized for such as we are. You may, it is true, have committed a fault, but it is before your sisters, who love you dearly, and will, therefore, know how to bear with your fault, having more compassion for you than passion against you. This confidence will greatly foster mutual love and the tranquility of our minds, which are liable to be disturbed when we are known to have failed in anything, as if it were a great wonder that we are imperfect."

"In fine," continues our holy founder, "this union of sisters should not only be in the heart, but should extend to their actions and conduct. They should bear a cordial love to one another in all things, vying with one another in showing marks of respect, always preferring others to themselves, and being very glad when these are preferred to themselves. They should esteem all that others do, charitably cover their defects, yield to their will and judgment,

serve them in all their wants, love their welfare and prefer their repose to their own. In fine, they should never refuse to do or suffer all that is possible to make them happy."

Second Point.

Engrave upon my heart, O my God, these words of my holy founder! May they become the rule of my conduct! Charity is the law and spirit of my Institute, the distinctive mark of the true disciples and children of my holy founders. In vain would I practice all other virtues, if I neglect this! Precious and divine charity, come into my heart! Banish from it a thousand contrary defects, resentments, coldness, antipathies, airs of contempt, indifference, haughtiness, partialities, and all those excesses opposed to the divine precepts! Correct in me the habit of forming rash judgments, revealing hidden faults, supposing, or suspecting evil! Ah! Lord, I acknowledge my iniquity and injustice! I am in a house in which Thou hast only faithful servants, whose fervor continually confounds me; I am surrounded by all that can edify me. How, then, have I persecuted Thy just ones? perhaps, condemned what Thou dost approve? been offended at what honors Thee? How have I blamed what is deserving of Thy reward? reprehended that, by which I should have profited? My sisters are in favor with Thee and I show them no favor. They enjoy Thy holy peace and I permit them not to be at peace with me. Thou treasurest their merits and I apply myself only to publish their imperfections. They succeed in pleasing Thee, and I am displeased at almost all they do. May Thy charity render me more equitable, and equity render me more charitable! I have, O Jesus, wounded Thy Heart in the most sensible manner by offending my sisters! Thy goodness towards them is so great, that their interest is, in some sort, dearer to Thee than Thy own. Yes, outrages against Thy glory, contempt of Thy love, seem to wound Thee less keenly than the least wrong done to Thy faithful spouses. How greatly then, have I irritated Thy anger by conceiving against them the slightest contempt? by nourishing in my soul the least aversion for their persons? by speaking

the least word to their disadvantage? How could I carry hatred even into Thy Sacred Heart, in which Thou hast placed them, warring against them, even in Thy bosom, thus wounding Thy paternal affection, wherein we should be all united? O God of mercy! Whose Heart is all goodness and sweetness, Whose bowels are all love and tenderness, how little have I known and practised a virtue so dear to Thy disciples! A virtue, which is the accomplishment and compendium of all virtues! Can I call by the name of charity the natural and human feelings that I entertained for certain persons? How different have been my views from Thine! Canst Thou recognize me as a child of St. Francis of Sales? Pardon O Lord, the wounds I have made in Thy Heart, in Thy sacred love! Enkindle once more in me the fire that I have unhappily extinguished! Consecrate by Thy grace all my affections! Impress deeply in my soul the sacred characters which, by Thy law, Thou hast already traced therein and sealed with Thy Blood upon the Cross! Make me love my neighbor as Thou hast loved me! Be Thou my rule! Be Thou my model! Thou has loved me so much as to shed Thy blood for me! Thus, should I love my sisters, if I wish to keep my rule and the spirit of my rule! Thou hast united us not only by the same nature, but by the same flesh and blood, in the bosom of our first parents, by the same religion, in the bosom of the Church! Thou hast made of Thy Body a sacred bond to bind us more closely in the unity of Thy Spirit! Thou dost constantly communicate to us Thy august Self, that, being nourished with the same substance, we may become but one same thing with Thee, and that by this nourishment, which is not changed into *our* substance, but changes us into Thee, we may no longer form but one heart in Thee and with Thee! I will, then, adore Thee O Jesus, in my neighbor, in whom Thou really art! I will love all in Thee! I will forgive as Thou hast forgiven! I will pardon that Thou mayest pardon me! Admirable resource for me, who owe Thy justice infinite satisfaction! Resource so advantageous, that St. John Chrysostom says, that if it were permitted, the sinner should wish to have enemies, in order that by pardoning them, he may obtain the pardon

of his sins! I will then profit by this powerful means! I will try to participate in that infinite goodness with which Thou didst pardon Thy enemies, and hast so often pardoned me!

No more disdain, rebuffs, dry or haughty manners. I will be humble, edifying, polite, grateful, full of regard, support, and respect for my sisters. With them, I will be familiar without meanness, polite without affectation, agreeable without flattery, upright through a principle of meekness, patience and mortification. I will love them without partiality, inconstancy, or weakness, for the love of Thee alone. I will overcome in myself every sentiment of dislike, antipathy and even of indifference. I will have no tie or attachment of which Thou art not the principle, rule, motive, and end. My charity will be true, sincere and cordial. It will be supernatural in its motive, universal in its object, efficacious in its works. It will be manifested, not only in word, but in deed; not only in offers, but in services, and, if necessary, in sacrifices. To oblige my sisters, I will not wait for their pressing needs or demands, but I will anticipate them, especially for those of whom I have reason to complain. I will correct those defects, which may be a subject of pain to them, and still more, those which may be a cause of disedification or bad example. I will judge equitably, spare charitably, support patiently the humor of others. I will sanctify mine by studying it attentively, restraining it constantly and regulating it religiously. Humility will be the base and foundation of my love of my sisters, and will inspire me with esteem for them and contempt for myself. It will lead me to yield to them the first place and always to seek the last, to excuse their faults and ignore my virtues, to rejoice at their advantages, talents, and success, and never to glory in my own. This is not enough, I will suffer with them, for them, and from them; I will say with St. Paul, and try to practice these oxioms as he did: "Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is scandalized and I am not on fire?" (II Corinth. xi., 29). There is no sort of trial, which I will not endure for my sisters, even so far as to be ready to become anathema, if possible, for their salvation. That nothing may be wanting to

the exercise of my charity, I declare that neither mortifications, nor injustice, nor persecutions, nor my disgust, nor their ingratitude, will ever prevent me from loving and serving them. I will have engraven in the depths of my heart and before my eyes this wonderful rule of my holy founder: "To suffer from every one, and make no one suffer from me."

EIGHTH DAY.

CONFERENCE ON AVERSIONS. — AND PARTICULAR FRIENDSHIPS.

"DEARLY beloved, let us love one another.—I. St. John iv., 7.

St. Jerome relates that, when the beloved disciple was broken by age and exhausted by weakness, he caused himself, languid as he was, to be carried in the arms of his disciples, that he might repeat to the assembled faithful, in a dying voice, these words of holy love: "My dear children, let us love one another." When they complained of his repetition, of this, and asked the reason, he made an answer worthy of him, who had reposed upon the bosom of a God and penetrated into the secrets of His Heart. "It is," said he, "the great precept of our Lord, and, if well observed, it is sufficient."

Thus, St. Francis of Sales, the illustrious imitator of the Beloved Disciple, said to His daughters: "Forget, if you will, every other counsel, in order to remember this short but essential lesson: Love one another, love one another for God, and according to God. Love one another as Jesus Christ has loved you. Love one another in time as you are destined to love each other for all eternity in heaven!"

He wished that his congregation should be, in a special manner, a society of which charity should be the bond and the soul, from which all dissension should be banished, and which, uniting all hearts, should conciliate all characters. He required a bearing with our neighbor, which would be proof against everything. There is scarcely one of his

letters or his entertainments, in which he does not recommend peace and union. When he spoke, he insinuated mutual love in his words and conversations, which were always useful and profitable. In all the visits he paid to the different houses of his Institute, he always inquired if a tender union dwelt there. He wished each community to be a sanctuary of peace and union. He would never suffer any contentions even in trifling things, because he knew there is no contention without emotion and generally, no emotion without sin. He knew that we cannot follow the impulse of passion without wounding ourselves and others, and that this gives rise to bitterness and coldness, indignation and aversion. To remedy this evil, he required that mutual condescension should be practised in everything not contrary to duty. "For," added he, "each one has her opinion on the most indifferent things, but if each one wished her opinion to prevail and be adopted, everything would be in confusion. But my opinion is good, says one; well, so is the opinion of the other. Therefore, let each one of you keep her opinion, since the apostle permits it, but let her not sin. To wish to contest and bring over everybody to our opinion, when there is no question of duty, is pride and obstinacy. Humble charity forbids this obstinacy, because we ought to consider others better and more enlightened than ourselves."

"As for those things," continues he, "in which our opinions are supported by the rule, we cannot form contrary ones, and no contentions are to be feared on that subject. Each one loves and respects her duty too much ever to deviate from the spirit of her state. This love of duty is the most powerful bond of union. All have the same intention of aspiring incessantly to the highest perfection. They mutually animate and fortify each other, for perfect charity is not limited to the present time, it is not contented with relieving the body, but it desires the perfection of our neighbor as well as our own."

It was thus our holy founder, after having established the necessity and motives of charity, entered into a detail of the motives that could nourish it. He wished that mutual love should dwell in the soul of each of his daughters and direct all her words. He forbade the expos-

ure of our neighbor's faults, all raillery or joking upon the looks, manners, mind, and qualities of the absent, or anything that might cast ridicule upon them. He was particularly averse to private friendships, aversions, antipathies, and sympathies, nourished in the heart and injurious to Jesus Christ and our neighbor.

"What is an aversion?" said he. "It is a certain inclination, sometimes natural, which makes us feel a repugnance to some persons. That is, we do not take pleasure in conversing with them, as we would in conversing with those towards whom we feel an inclination, or whom we love with a sensible love. Now, we must pay no attention to these natural aversions or inclinations except to submit them all to reason. The only remedy for this evil, as for every other sort of temptation, is a simple diversion. I mean, not to think of it. But the misfortune is, we always wish to know if we are right or not, in having an aversion for some person. Ah! never must we amuse ourselves in this research, for our self-love, which never sleeps, will make us believe that we have good reasons; that is to say, it will make us see, that it is true that we have certain reasons which seem to us good. If these be approved by our pride and judgment, there will be no means to prevent our finding them just and reasonable. Now, we must guard against this. I speak more at length upon this point, because it is of importance. We never have good reason for an aversion, much less to nourish such a thing. I say, therefore, when it is a simple natural aversion, we must turn away from it, without seeming to notice it. But we must combat and subdue it, when we see that it goes farther, and wishes to make us depart from the submission that we owe to reason. For reason never permits us to do anything in favor of our aversions or inclinations, when there is danger of our offending God."

"Our inclinations, as well as aversions," continues our holy founder, "must be conformable to reason. We must testify that we love our sisters. We must render to all, as far as we can, external evidences of our affection, but without testifying too much familiarity, as the rule says. Thus, we must testify that we love our sisters and

take pleasure in being with them, provided that sanctity always accompanies the testimony that we render them. St. Paul wishes that our affection be manifested in a holy manner. You ask, if it be lawful to testify more affection for a sister, whom you esteem more virtuous than another. To this, I answer that, although we are obliged to love most with the love of complacency those, who are the most virtuous, we should not, however, love them most with the love of benevolence, and we should not give to them greater proofs of friendship. There are two reasons for this: first, our Lord did not do it. It even seems that He showed more affection for the imperfect than for the perfect, since He said, that He had not come for the just, but for sinners. It is to those who have most need of us that we should more effectually testify our love, for, then, we show better that we love through charity, than when we love those who give us consolation. In this we must proceed as the needs of our neighbor demand. In other respects, we must endeavor to love all equally, since our Lord did not say: Love the most virtuous; but indifferently: 'Love one another, as I have loved you.' Secondly, the reason that forbids our rendering testimonies of friendship to some more than others is that we cannot judge who are the most perfect and have most virtue, for exterior appearances are often deceitful, and very often those who seem to you to be the most virtuous are not so before God, Who alone knows them. On the contrary, it may happen, that a sister, whom you see fall very often and commit many imperfections, will be more virtuous and more agreeable to God, either on account of the greatness of her courage amid her imperfections, or the humility she derives from them, or in fine, the love of her abjection. We must, therefore, maintain ourselves as equally as possible in the love we owe our sisters, for the aforesaid reasons, and all ought to know that we love them with this mutual love, without our saying that we love them dearly. When we love one more than another, because we feel a particular inclination for her, our love is not more perfect, but more subject to change at the least thing she will do. If we have an inclination to love one more than another, we should not think of it, much less tell it to her. We should

love our neighbor not through inclination, but because he is made to the image and likeness of God, and because it is God's will that we should love every one."

Thus does St. Francis of Sales express himself, or rather, such is the condemnation he pronounces against that false, defective charity, rejected by God, because it is purely human and natural; and against those aversions, those dislikes, wilfully entertained; and, in general, that charity limited to a certain number, to a certain choice of persons. Inclinations and antipathies for one are according to the difference of feeling with which a sister conducts herself. Another has her particular friends for whom she spares nothing, but she takes little interest in what regards the rest of the community. A third has her predilections for some, her resentments for others. Thus, the order of charity is overthrown in religious houses, which are established only to preserve the spirit of the early church, and of the primitive christians who composed it, and who all formed but one heart and one soul. Our holy Father has endeavored to guard against this disorder in his Institute, by conciliating all hearts, by leading them to perfect conformity and most holy unity. A religious of the Visitation, more than any other, should, therefore, be animated by that patient charity which nothing alters, that universal charity which refuses nothing, that supernatural charity which loves only for God and in view of God. "She loves her dear neighbor," says our holy Mother de Chantal, "she views her only in the bosom of our divine Saviour. She is all gentleness, all sweetness, all charity; she excuses everything, supports everything, never judges any one, always condemning herself and no one else. She is convinced that nothing is due to her, that she does not deserve to be mentioned. She looks upon herself as the last in the house of the Lord, although she may have had the happiness of living in it a long time. If she finds any emotion in her heart against her neighbor, she immediately stifles it, and never lets a word of complaint escape her." She knows that if we unhappily listen to our passion, it is a fire which quickly kindles, and that one spark produces a great conflagration; that it is easier to say nothing than to moderate our tongue,

when once we let it loose. She often prays that a guard of circumspection may be set on her lips, that nothing may escape them which could wound or weaken the holy union that reigns in the house. Her love for her neighbor has the Holy Ghost, not flesh nor blood, for its principle, God, not qualities purely natural for its object and motive; eternity, not a momentary satisfaction for its term. Natural inclination does not determine her charity, but the movements of grace, the view of God and the imitation of Jesus Christ.

Nothing is so vast as her heart, her charity is universal. It extends to all without exception of persons, because we are all comprised under the name and quality of neighbor. If she has to live with persons less amiable or reasonable, full of defects, and persons of an odd, difficult, disagreeable humor, without feeling, education or gratitude; if she cannot have that sensible affection, which does not depend upon us, she has that real and solid charity which religion inspires. She loves her neighbor in spite of her imperfections and even of her vices, as her divine Saviour loves her notwithstanding her defects and miseries. She excepts no one, lest it might be Jesus Christ, Himself, Whom she excepts. She willingly supports weaknesses, which remind her of her own, and forgives so much the more readily, as she is persuaded that everyone is incessantly forgiving her. She often remembers that maxim of St. Paul, which her holy Mother had constantly upon her lips: "Bear ye one another's burthens." She even thinks that this law of mutual support is more advantageous for her than for anyone else, that if any of the sisters had a right to complain, it would be those who are witnesses of her defects and imperfections. If the maxims, discourses, sentiments, humor, conduct, even the countenance of others offend her, she cannot perhaps help experiencing feelings of antipathy, but she can refrain from entertaining them interiorly in her heart, or from showing them exteriorly by her manner. She makes to God the double sacrifice of what she experiences within, and of what she might testify without. She never wilfully entertains any sentiments of aversion, contempt or hatred for any person, and never shows by her air, words, or

conduct anything that may naturally displease her. Through an exterior which may be despicable, she penetrates to the bottom of the soul, to consider its amiable qualities. She sees in every one the image of Jesus Christ, with Whose Precious Blood she is covered. She remembers this advice of her holy founder: "If the action of your neighbor has a hundred different aspects, always view the best side. Think she is like a diamond, covered with dust or mud, and not less valuable on that account. She closes her eyes to the weakness of her neighbor, becomes blind, as it were, to dissemble her faults, makes it a law not to speak of them, excuses, diminishes, and justifies them as far as she can. Being fully persuaded, as her holy founder was, that there is no one so miserable as not to have something good in her, she takes for the foundation of her love whatever is most estimable in this soul, and whenever she is ill-spoken of, she excuses her. Or, as her holy Mother did, she keeps her eyes fixed on her own defects, and sees only what is good in her neighbor. She sees virtues and good qualities everywhere and in every one; she has a particular talent for speaking of them and making them known. It is only on this condition, that she consents to converse with her neighbor. What she says is accompanied with an air of sincerity and conviction, that persuades those who hear her, and never do they leave her company without having learned something good of those of whom she has spoken.

Such is the love of a religious for all her sisters in general, and still greater is her tenderness towards those, who give her some cause of vexation, or who have designedly done her some unkind office. Her charity is ardent enough to consume as straws all these little subjects of discontent. She is as ready to give them pleasure, as they were to give her pain. She prays for them, speaks to their advantage, and renders them every duty or service in her power. She avenges herself only by benefits, loves those that hate her, and looks upon no one as an enemy, because she is convinced that those who injure her render her a great good, which obliges her to regard them more favorably than her best friends. They oblige her to watch over her actions, and to do nothing

from which she can draw any advantage. They give her occasions of patience, and, at the same time, means of appeasing the anger of God, paying her debts, meriting graces, and working out her salvation. Whilst friends often flatter her passions, support her in her defects, and withdraw her from God, by praising what should be blamed and blaming what should be praised.

But the love of her neighbor does not lead her, under pretext of mutual union, to form particular friendships. As she does not extend to her neighbor her hatred for vice, neither does she extend to vice the love she ought to have for her neighbor; that is to say, that she does not love her neighbor in a manner that leads her to transgress her rules and deviate from her duty. She knows, that besides the envy, murmuring and bad example caused in a community by particular friendships, they often lead to the violation of silence and other observances; that they produce detractions, railleries, aversions, judgments, suspicions, complaints, animosities, bitterness, parties, divisions, hatred and scandalous schisms, which tear to pieces a community within, and dishonor it without. She knows that there is an essential difference between charity and sympathy, between charity and natural inclinations, between charity and conformity of humor, between charity and selfishness, between charity and policy, between charity and the connection of flesh and blood. She leaves to pagans sentiments, inclinations, and affections purely natural, human and profane. It is Jesus Christ alone, Whom she sees in her neighbor; her charity emanates from Him, and tends to Him. In her heart, she loves those most who are most fervent, because our Lord Himself loves them more than those, who are less faithful to Him. But she never gives them marks of this love, which might offend others, excite their jealousy, or lead to coolness and disunion.

Finally, she has no predilection for this one, or coldness of heart for the other. She is attentive to purify her inclinations, even those that are innocent and reasonable, to sacrifice her natural aversions, of which she has not the control. To avoid every rock, she loves equally all her Sisters in God, and for God. No human motives

degrade her sentiments. No earthly views mar her charity. Conformity of humor, character, taste, and inclination count as nothing in her affections. She loves sincerely and from the heart, effectively, actively, universally, without exception. She loves in the Heart of our common Father; she loves as Jesus Christ has loved us, as the saints love in heaven. Destined to love and to be forever united to her sisters in God, she loves them in this world for Him, and in Him, in order to love them forever in heaven.

NINTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.—ON THE GRACE OF A RELIGIOUS VOCATION.

First Point.

“BUT you are a chosen generation, . . . a holy nation, a purchased people; that you may declare His virtues, who hath called you out of darkness into His admirable light.”—I Ep. St. Peter, ii., 9.

How lively should be the gratitude of a religious for the holy vocation, of which it has pleased God to grant her the grace! Through greatness He owed her nothing; through justice He owed her rigorous chastisements; but through goodness He loved her with a love of predilection, and this love, made Him open to her all his treasures. What would have become of her if this beneficent God had not looked upon her with an eye of mercy? She would still have been in the darkness of nothingness, in the darkness of sin, or in the darkness of the world, three profound nights, in which she would have been unhappily buried; the night of nothingness, which would have rendered her incapable of ever seeing God; the night of sin, which would have rendered her unworthy of ever possessing Him; the night of the world, which would, perhaps, have removed her from Him forever. She was nothing, and this divine Benefactor drew her from nothingness; she was in sin, and He purified her in the waters of baptism; she was in the world, and He disengaged her

from it to bring her into His sanctuary. He became her heavenly Father by giving her birth ; her true Redeemer, by delivering her from the bonds of sin ; her Protector and her God, by sheltering her in the asylum which His goodness prepared for her. To how many others has He not refused the same favors ! But not satisfied with delivering her from the greatest evils, He has lavished upon her the greatest benefits. He has imprinted on her, His most holy image ; He has placed her in the number of His dearest children ; He has surrounded her with His most brilliant lights ; He has revealed to her His most sublime truths ; He has given her a most special right to the heavenly inheritance. Her soul has become His most cherished temple ; her whole person has been consecrated to Him ; she is His, and great as He is, she can say in her turn, that He disdains not to be hers. At the sight of all these graces, should not a religious be penetrated with the most tender and lively gratitude ? Should not her lips incessantly proclaim the greatness of a God, so tender and so powerful ? Should not her whole life be worthy of Him ?

Can she ever sufficiently estimate the benefit of her vocation, a favor which she should value a thousand times more than all the sceptres and crowns of the universe ? Can she ever sufficiently esteem a state which preserves her from an infinity of sins, which she would have committed in the world ; which occupies her continually with exercises of piety ; which enables her to gain at each moment immortal crowns of glory ; which gives her God Himself for her portion ; which procures her the honor and advantage of dwelling in His house, where she enjoys those ineffable delights, which will infallibly conduct her to heaven, if she faithfully fulfils her duties ? Ah ! it is an inestimable grace, and only in eternity will she know its full value. What is there in christianity greater than martyrdom, which seems to be most excellent and most perfect, because charity cannot be carried farther than to suffer death for Jesus Christ ? But, the religious state is more than a martyrdom. It contains as many martyrdoms, as the virtues it obliges her to practice. " Because," says St. Francis of Sales, " all the virtues making us die

to the opposite vices, immolating us to God, and causing us the greatest violence to practice them, are so many martyrdoms."

Thus, it may be said of a true religious, that she resembles those heroes, and heroines of religion, who have suffered a great number of martyrdoms, by the multitude of different torments which the cruelty of tyrants made them undergo. Yet this difference, which is so glorious to her, marks the change; *First*, her martyrdom is voluntary, whereas that of the other martyrs was often brought about by the sight of the sword of the eternal God ready to strike them, if they betrayed their religion. Jesus Christ in asking her heart did not ask it as a Master; but as a Spouse. *Second*, they were martyrs of faith, but she is a martyr of perfection; they suffered that they might not lose their souls, and she suffers to render hers more perfect and more agreeable to God. They were martyrs of the war which the Church endured, and she is a martyr of the peace which it enjoys, a sacrifice, so much the greater, as it is more voluntary. *Third*, the torments of the other martyrs were soon ended, whilst hers, although less acute, keeps the victim in constant suspense, leaving her until death no respite, but what is necessary not to fail under the burden. How happy, then, is the religious soul, which is called to a state, wherein she can merit so many crowns!

Her state places her not simply in the rank of martyrs. It also gives her a place among the apostles, prophets, patriarchs, and the angels, and even elevates her to the highest choirs of the cherubim and seraphim. It gives her a place among the apostles, because, if the pastors of the Church are the heirs of their power, by the character which they receive at their ordination, the religious soul is the heiress of their sanctity, by her renunciation of all temporal possessions, her application to prayer, and her interior, painful, and austere life. This made St. Francis of Sales say, that the religious life is an imitation of the laborious lives of the Apostles. Her state gives her a place among the prophets, because she is their disciple, child, and emulator; because removed from the world she imitates their hidden life, like them, she passes her days in

continual discourses with God, and she announces future events more by her actions than by her words; that is to say, the coming of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and the destruction of the empire of the devil. Her state gives her a place among the patriarchs, because it renders her the heiress of their faith and of their simplicity, and in some manner, the mother of those whom she begets spiritually, by the prayers and good works which she offers continually for their salvation, and by the edifying spectacle she presents them of her life. Her state gives her a place among the angels, because it makes her lead an angelic life, as St. Francis of Sales remarks, and keeps her occupied continually in singing the praises of God. In fine, her state elevates her to the choirs of cherubim and seraphim, because it fills her with light and ardor, which, in imitation of them, she afterwards infuses into the hearts of others. "In a word," her state, says St. Francis of Sales, after St. Cyprian and St. Gregory, "is the inheritance of the God of Jacob, over which He sheds a more abundant reign of His graces. Her heart is His temple, wherein He keeps His richest treasures, and she, herself, is a flower of the garden of the Church, which beautifies, ornaments, and embalms with sweet odor all around her. She is the living image of Jesus Christ, expressing faithfully all the trials of His sanctity. She is a member of the most illustrious portion of the flock of her divine Shepherd; one of the precious stones in the sacred edifice of which Jesus Christ is the foundation and corner-stone; in fine one of the pillars of faith, and this is to be her crown." Can she then sufficiently love, honor, and respect so excellent and so illustrious a state? Should she not incessantly congratulate herself on being called to it, and spare nothing to fulfil its obligations most perfectly? It is not sufficient to have entered faithfully into her vocation, she must fulfil it. Saul was called by God Himself to royalty; the disciple, who betrayed his Master, was called by Jesus Christ to the Apostleship; but do not their terrible falls, show that the best vocation is not of itself sufficient; that it is necessary to correspond to it by fulfilling all its duties? "In effect," says our holy Founders, "would it not be a monstrous thing, to see in

one same religious, a high dignity and a low life; an eminent condition and a scandalous conduct; a state worthy of respect, and manners worthy of contempt?"

Second Point.

O my God, can I ever sufficiently thank Thee for the mercy Thou hast shown me, in calling me to religion? Or rather what sorrow can I show sufficiently great to expiate my ingratitude towards Thee, and my infidelities to the promises I have made Thee, and which I have so badly observed?

It is not to the chance effect of an inevitable fatality, that I owe my state, but to Thy goodness, O God, Who, as the apostle says, hast called me from the womb of my mother. I was not yet, and Thou didst take possession of me; before anything was created, Thou hadst destined me for religion. The heavens were not yet stretched out, nor the earth fixed on its axis, and Thou hadst already chosen me. Before all time, before all ages, Thou hadst distinguished me in the chaos of nothingness, not only to give me being, which is a common grace, a general benefit, but to place me in Thy sanctuary, and to establish there my salvation and repose. It is neither to my birth, to my own efforts, nor to a chain of secondary causes, but to Thy infinite mercy, to Thy gratuitous love, that I owe it. Thrice happy portion! Before consecrating myself to Thee, my soul was already enriched with Thy benefits. Thou hadst given me a new birth in Baptism, Thou hadst infused into my heart, the precious gifts of Thy spirit, the sublime virtues of faith, hope and love, virtues which attach to Thee, those that possess them, and which at the same time are the pledges and sources of salvation! I enjoyed the quality of Thy child, and Thou hadst given me a right to the heavenly inheritance!

What was yet wanting to my elevation? In the views of Thy mercy for me, there was in Thy house, which is the Church, a rank above every rank, a dignity above all the dignities to which I could aspire,—the quality of Thy spouse. And it was to this title, this eminent quality that

Thou wast pleased to raise me, although I had already rendered myself unworthy of it, although I had been most ungrateful and unfaithful to Thy first liberalities ! Thus, O my Saviour, Thou didst display in me the riches of Thy grace, and Thy adorable mercies, deigning to make me enter into so close an alliance with Thee ! Ah ! these are not pure ideas, nor brilliant chimeras, sometimes formed in sleep by flattering dreams. They are truths full of all that is real and solid in the world. In giving myself to Thee, Thy divine word assured me, that Thou gavest Thyself to me as my portion and inheritance ; that after having purified me Thou didst espouse me in the virtue of Thy Blood ; that in giving me the title of Thy spouse, a name, which like Thine, O Jesus, is above every name, Thou didst make me enter into a participation of Thy riches and greatness ; that I might receive the pledge and assurance of sharing with Thee, as much as a simple creature is capable of, the throne on which Thou art seated in heaven ; and that, according to the laws which Thou hast established, I have, as Thy spouse, a right to all that belongs to Thee ! In giving me Thy Hand, Thou didst give me Thy Heart, with a right over Thyself and Thy benefits ! Ah ! this is truly the gift of God ; why can I not understand and feel it, or at least know it in all its extent !

O magnificence, eternally memorable ! O immense love of my God for me, why is not my love and my gratitude as exhaustless as my Benefactor and His benefits ? I cast myself at Thy feet, O my God, and since Thou willest it, and it is permitted me to say it, O my divine Spouse ! In imitation of the Blessed Virgin, the first of Thy spouses, O Lord my God, my soul glorifies Thee, because Thou hast regarded the lowliness of Thy handmaid, and hast done great things in me ! What can I render Thee, O liberal God ? When the world calls, although it makes only victims, with what eagerness is it followed, and with what ardor is it served ! Thus should I follow and serve Thee, O Lord ! But alas ! how slowly and with what reserve have I followed Thee ? What a hateful spectacle presents itself to my eyes, in the succession of my years, in the tepidity of my life, in the darkness of my conscience ? I should have loved Thee,

not in words, but in deed and in truth, as Thy favorite disciple says! What have I done, and what have I felt for Thee, O Lord, but some imperfect sentiments, some transient desires, some interior emotions, soon interrupted! I have sung Thy praises, but without attention, without fervor. I have done some apparent works, but in them temperament, humor and my own will, perhaps, had more part than the impulse of Thy grace!

What ruled in the secret of my will, and by what was my soul governed? By this Thou wilt judge me, O Searcher of hearts! In all events, has Thy love, or my self love directed me? Has religious humility or pride animated me? Has Thy grace or have my senses determined my actions? How many faults so often pardoned, and so often repeated! Alas! instead of honoring and glorifying Thee in this holy state, I have rendered myself like those foolish virgins, spoken of in the Gospel, who, by their negligence, caused themselves to be repudiated! O divine Spouse! I deserve to be rejected and abandoned by Thee. I am unworthy that Thou shouldst receive me again. Give me a place in Thy heart, and form with me a new alliance. Yet, whence comes this humiliating confusion which overwhelms me, this lively sensibility which fills me with remorse for my infidelities? What, Lord! after all my ingratitude and so much abuse of Thy grace, Thou wishest still to confide in me, recalling me to Thee! Ah! permit me to say to Thee with tears, may I die or change, for after so many favors I can no longer consent to displease Thee. But in this alternative of death or change, what would become of me, if I should die without conversion? Change me, O my God, and attach me inviolably to Thyself! Let me at least render Thee all I can, if not all I owe Thee!

Alas! what should I have been in the world, if I had remained there? It is easy to judge, by what I am in religion. Would I have thought, acted, and spoken differently from so many others there? Would not the example of the multitude have led me astray? Would not the fear of rendering myself singular, of drawing upon myself reproaches, have subjected me to customs which, perhaps, I would interiorly have detested and condemned?

I have all the weakness and imperfections of my state. Would I not have had all the crimes of a perverted world, if by a special grace Thou hadst not withdrawn me from that unhappy Babylon? Immortal thanks be to Thee, O Lord! for the precious benefit of my vocation, of which I perceive, more than ever, the value. Thou hast called me through love and mercy, O my God, and in return I will love Thee with my whole heart and soul. My heart is Thine, divine Spouse, and it shall be Thine without reserve! No more creatures to attach it, no more interests to debase it, no more objects to divide it! Console me or try me, and Thou shalt be equally served and loved. Were there no other paradise, is it not one to love Thee? What has it not cost Thee to overcome my unworthiness in the past and the present? I promise Thee, O my God, that nothing will hinder me from overcoming my weakness, and inclinations; do Thou render my promises efficacious!

Thou dost proportion Thy graces to my misery, imperfection and needs. I will conform myself to Thy views and designs. I will rectify by my fidelity, what might have been natural and human in my choice, and what has been criminal and defective in my daily conduct. Thou hast triumphed, I will unite my strength to Thine, to attach myself intimately to Thee forever!

NINTH DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.—ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE.

First Point.

“AND I will espouse thee to me in justice, and judgment, and in mercy, and in commiserations.”—Osee ii., 19.

How august is this alliance, which the God of glory and of majesty, has formed with the religious soul! It is an alliance of justice which has piety for its principle, and perfection for its object. Everything in it is just; all is

holy. Purity is its foundation, graces are its ornament, and the motives which lead to it do not partake of flesh and blood, but, if we may so speak of the divinity. The benefits and pleasures to which it leads, have in them nothing mean or terrestrial. Candor, peace, union, charity, wisdom, are its appendages. It extends its right even to heaven, and its bonds, which death cannot sever, are consecrated by eternity. What an alliance, in which everything tends to virtue, and conspires to real happiness! It is an alliance of judgment which condemns the world, confounds its baseness, and vain pretends. It is an alliance of mercy, which is a source of confidence and joy in the Lord. It consoles in pains, supports in weakness, gives God Himself for a Protector and Guide, shelters from all evils, fills with all blessings, and preserves from the thunderbolt, which strikes and overturns the tents of sinners. There is no danger, no temptation, no pain over which it does not triumph. What surer way for salvation? What state freer from cares and solitudes? What rich treasures hidden in this fertile field? Divine graces, and consolations, good examples, holy emulations in the practice of all virtues; salutary conversations which reanimate or increase the sacred fire of divine love; exercises of piety which succeed each other, meditations, prayers, pious readings, frequent approach to the Sacraments, retreats, instructions, duties which have their prescribed time and limits, all thrive within this garden. What a fruitful source of all benedictions! Charity, joy, peace, patience, meekness and goodness, happy fruits of the Holy Ghost, which make of all the members, but one body, one heart, and one soul; treasures, so much the more precious as they are inexhaustable, supplying abundantly every spiritual want, and increasing in proportion as they are used.

St. Francis of Sales says, that the sovereign happiness of man is properly contained in two objects, a holy life and a holy death, and such is the felicity of the religious soul. She finds in her state the inestimable advantages of living more holily than in the world, and of dying in a greater assurance of her salvation. She enjoys in religion, if she has its spirit, a foretaste of the eternal happiness

which awaits her. Everything is for her a means of sanctification; even her innocent recreations are turned into pious exercises. Should she make a false step, she is warned, supported, assisted to rise, and has not time to sink deep into the abyss. In the asylum of her safety and salvation, vigilance is prescribed her, mortification commanded, a victory over her passions, and hatred of self indispensable. She therefore makes incessant war against herself, deals mortal blows against her self-love, and in this combat and self-destruction she finds the germ of peace, and the sweetness of purest consolations. What can afflict or trouble her repose, without or within? Within there are subjections, submission, dependance, rules, observances, and customs, it is true; but these are loving bonds which she has chosen, and which she cherishes; sweet chains which her God, Himself, has imposed upon her, and which honor her more than they bind her. Without, there are indifference, neglect, contempt, persecutions; but she expected these, and sees in them the glorious portion of a faithful spouse of a crucified God. Around her are privations, humiliations, death and sacrifice; but what are these to her, who desires still greater? She has combats to sustain, but God, Who views her efforts, changes her desert into a land of promise, where milk and honey flow in abundance, and the sweetest unction issues from the hardness of the rock, that is from the severity of the rules and observances she must practice. The imagination captivated by custody of the senses is filled with the purest lights. Her body, reduced to servitude, acquires a kind of vigor, preferable to the delights of life. Her mind, subjected by a holy recollection, and restored to the ingenuousness of childhood by the abandonment of a reason merely human, becomes more fitted for the sweet communications of the Holy Ghost. Her will, restrained by vows, is so much the more free, as she keeps it confined in its bonds. Her quality of Spouse of Jesus Christ, fills with an inexpressible sweetness, the bitterness of the chalice, which she shares with her Spouse. In this abode of religion, the sorrows of Calvary and the joys of Thabor are united for her: in the midst of the furnace of a

purifying fire, she is refreshed by the gentle dew of heaven. She experiences a mystical martyrdom, the wound of which is more delicious than painful; and the divine pleasures which inebriate her are of such a nature, that all the revolutions of the earth, and all the efforts of hell cannot alter them. Divine pleasures! the foretaste and pledge of eternal felicity!

What contentment is enjoyed in a condition, where with the happiness of loving God, and the pleasure of enjoying Him, we have the assurance of possessing Him forever! The religious soul, peaceful and retired, sheltered from the storm as in a safe port, occupies herself with the sole care of serving her God. She sanctifies even the most human actions by referring them to His love. She asks herself incessantly, is God pleased with me? Do I love Him as I ought? Am I faithful to His graces? Holy disquiets, which are not barren and hurtful thorns that stop her in the way, but rather a pressing stimulus that increases her love for the service of God. Happy, then, the soul who has placed a wall of eternal separation between herself and the world! Happy the soul, who has sacrificed all that it was not permitted her to love! Who has diminished her pains, by diminishing her attachments! Who has died to everything, before everything died to her! Happy, a thousand times happy, to have consecrated herself to a God who has chosen her, to take up his abode in the midst of her heart, and to establish there an eternal peace and serenity. "The sanctuary in which she dwells," says St. Francis of Sales, "is a delicious paradise, which has about it something comparable to the happiness of the earthly paradise." May we not add that it has this advantage over the first paradise? The earthly paradise rendered an innocent soul guilty, whereas, this renders the guilty, as it were, innocent. The first was like a barren plain, exposed to the inflamed darts of Satan; whereas, this is like a land surrounded by mountains and forts, which the enemy can reach only with difficulty, and which presents on all sides ramparts almost inaccessible to his attacks; that is to say, where temptations are less, and helps greater. It is a holy habitation which is a preserva-

tive against all that is most contagious and mortal in the world ; against those flattering illusions, which so agreeably charm the eye, but which soon, lead to the precipice. It is the surest preservative against those false maxims so often condemned in the Gospel, but established in the world as incontestable principles and followed as sure rules. It is the speediest preservative against that tyranny of the passions, which unceasingly awakened, and excited in the world by all that strikes the senses, absolutely destroys in the soul even the empire of reason. It is, finally, the most certain preservative against those criminal attachments, those vicious habits, which rise so quickly, alas ! but which it costs so much to uproot ; against those falls of worldlings so deep and so frequent. Here, by evangelical abnegation, the religious soul has no treasures to amass, no rights to defend, no interests to preserve, no injuries to repair, no dignity to support, no fortune to acquire, no rival to humble ; consequently, she is perfectly disengaged from all those selfish views and desires, those agitations, and in a word, from the injustice with which the world is filled. "It is in this enclosed garden," says St. Francis of Sales, that the Spouse of Jesus Christ bears fruit for life eternal. In this happy land she is planted, as it were, by the hand of God, watered by His grace, nourished by the unction of His gifts, pruned by the knife of penance, cultivated by continual cares, sheltered from the storms of the world, and bears in abundance the fruits of virtue." How advantageous it is, then, to live in so holy and tranquil a state, where charity, that has grown cold in the world, seems to revive its holy ardors ; in a state, where one lives like a pure spirit, where the soul is detached from the body without being separated from it, where disinterested hearts divest themselves of everything, to be enriched with future hopes ; where they rest in the enjoyment of God, and find in Him the truth which enlightens them, the life which animates them, the eternity which supports them, the charity which rules and burns within them ; hearts that feel a holy impatience at the length of their exile, and ardently desire to break the bonds which keep them upon earth ; hearts whose love is so fervent, that they can

scarcely support its ardor ; whose love is so constant, that they carry it in conversation, labors, employments, watchings, sleep even, like the Spouse in the Canticles, whose heart was occupied with God, whilst she allowed some repose to her body.

Second Point.

Ah ! the benefit of a religious vocation passes for one only grace, but what a multitude of graces there in that one ! Is there a single day in which I do not receive more than a person in the world receives, perhaps, in the course of a whole year ? If I were faithful to them, to what degree would they not still be multiplied ? What return shall I not make for so many benefits ? Ye Angels of Heaven ! Ye heavenly hosts of the Most High ! supply my incapacity ; bless the Lord for so many and so signal favors !

I am no longer my own, I am no longer the world's but I am Jesus Christ's. What a happiness, what a glory ! how enviable is my faith ! O blessed bonds, which unite me to my God ! how dear you are to me, how precious ! Yes, my chains by retaining me in servitude, cause me to enjoy true liberty. O sacred bonds, formed by love, will I ever wish to break You ! Ah ! rather, a thousand times, add new ones and strengthen them more and more. Thou hast placed me in the number of Thy Spouses, O Lord, and what dost Thou not expect from my fidelity ? If there can be on earth a mark of predestination, it is that of being called to a state so holy and so proper to fulfil the designs of Thy mercy in my regard. But if I be unfaithful to Thee, O Jesus, and lose that peace destined for me in heaven, a place far elevated above that reserved for the generality of the faithful, will not the very centre of hell be my place, and will not all the efforts of Thy just anger, be exhausted upon me ? Overwhelming thought ! But there is another still more horrible to me, O my God ! it is the loss of Thy love, the privation of the sight of Thee. Thou hast chosen me, O my divine Spouse ; Thou hast called me to reign eternally with Thee, and to love Thee without measure and without end ; from this moment, therefore, my conversation and my love shall be in heaven. Far be it from me to take back anything I have given Thee, sacrificed or consecra-

ted to Thee. I am all Thine, O Jesus, and every day I will renew the offering. I am Thine, and it shall be all my glory, and consolation during life, and at death, to be entirely Thine. Reign in my heart, dispose of it, as a thing that belongs to Thee. I have nothing more in common with the world; but Thou art mine, and this is the source of my confidence, which shall not be confounded. I offer Thee all, O God, from whom I have received all; I consecrate to Thee, anew, not only the fruits of the tree, but the tree itself, with all the fruits it shall produce. My body shall be a victim ever living and ever dying for Thy love; my liberty will be my rule; my will, will be my superior who alone can dispose of me; and these sentiments will no longer vary. Ah! should I have a century, an eternity to live, I will be constantly Thine, O Lord. Neither health nor sickness, nor trials, nor consolations, shall ever separate me from Thee.

This would be promising much if I relied upon my own strength; but Thou, O Lord, wilt speak to my heart, and Thy grace will fix my inconstancy. May I not expect everything from Him, who has delivered me from so many evils? What would have been my fate in the world? Without doubt that of the unfortunate persons who live in it. If they experience want, their whole life is spent in acquiring and preserving what their cupidity, or their necessities require. How many disquietudes, mortifications, labors, and often crimes! Have they the leisure or the thought to serve Thee, O my God? At death, they appear before Thy dread tribunal, without having labored at the one thing necessary. If they are prosperous, according to the world, they think only of enjoying the present good; slaves of its corrupt maxims and customs! They pass their time in a succession of amusements, good cheer, useless or dangerous conversations, jealousies, animosities, sins, and a profane forgetfulness of eternity; this would have filled my life; this is what I would have done. My natural love of an easy and comfortable life, human respect, and the example of others would certainly have drawn me away. The difficulty I now find in overcoming myself, although in the midst of the greatest helps, is a proof to me, that in the world, I should never have over-

come myself. How advantageous then, for me to have been withdrawn from temptation, to be entirely occupied in serving and pleasing Thee, my God ; a tranquil pleasure which leaves no void, no remorse, no sin, after it ; a pleasure which will magnificently indemnify me for every pains.

I am relieved of all disquieting care of my conduct. In the world each one is his own God. He consults only interest, humor or passion. He does and wishes what pleases him, for the only reason that it pleases. In the world, even among the most devout persons, who allow that a rule of conduct should be observed, are there many who consult God, who listen to Him when He commands, or who obey when He speaks? Here I have my rules and the orders of my superiors, and in conforming to them, I am sure that I am in order, and that I please Thee, O my God ; and what tranquility and consolation are produced thereby ! No evil can happen to me, or if it should I am sure, O Lord, that Thou wilt make it turn to my good. Thou knowest all, and Thou canst do all : Thou lovest me, and I love Thee. May Thy will be accomplished in me, in life and in death ; in time and in eternity ; it is what I have asked and will ask of Thee, until my last breath.

I am delivered from the vicissitudes of natural inconstancy. The bond which I have formed fixes my will. It is no longer permitted me to do, what it would be useful to will. Temptation may come, but it will pass. Nature will be calmed. And how many times will I bless the Lord for having closed all the doors to a humiliating and dangerous relapse. Happy necessity, which constrains me to that which is best and most perfect. Should I ever think of turning back ; the great step has been taken, there remains only to continue it to the end. Without such an engagement I could not answer for myself a single day. My past inconstancy has taught me this but too well. But my need does not render my sacrifice less meritorious. I am bound because I will it, and I will never cease to will it. Thou canst not, O my God, either sin or do anything unworthy of Thyself ; art Thou less free? The more impossible evil becomes to me, the more is my freedom like Thine. My profession renders it, as

much as my fragility permits, impossible to me. Ah! that I could make it still more impossible. Immutable God, do Thou steady my inconstancy! Eternal God make me love more and more my sweet and amiable necessity. Finally, of what reward does not my religious profession assure me? A hundred-fold is promised me. Thy word is given, and heaven will fail rather than Thy word. But what is this hundred-fold? To know the fragility and dangers of worldly goods, to enjoy heavenly things, to have the repose of a pure and innocent conscience, to hear God within my heart, to feel His assistance, His strength, the abundance of His lights, an inundation of consolations. What favors! Ah! my only attention, then, shall be to renounce all, more in heart, than in reality; for it is to this the hundred-fold is promised. If I have had pain has it not always been when I wished to divide my heart or spare myself. No more reserve, no more division, Lord. Thou art mine, and I am Thine, only, and forever.

NINTH DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION.—ON THE ENGAGEMENTS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE.

First Point.

“THOU art all Mine.” Cant.

It is to every religious, as well as to the Daughter of Sion, that these lively and touching words are addressed. “Thou art all Mine,” says Jesus Christ to her, that is to say, you should be no more to the world, to seek or possess its wealth; you should no longer hold to flesh and blood, to consult its desires; you should no longer be your own, to follow your own will. You have sacrificed to Me, the advantages of the world, by an unreserved renunciation; your senses by a spotless purity; your heart by a full and faithful submission. These are the engagements comprised in your vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

These vows you have formed freely, and you should fulfil them faithfully. By them, you have given Me every right over you, and thus you have become all Mine.

Thus a religious is all to God; that is, she is dead to the world and its advantages. She has no longer any treasures but in heaven, and where her treasure is, there, also, must be her heart. Happy poverty, which in divesting her of all ownership, in taking from her, earthly possessions, has enriched her with heavenly gifts. Happy exchange of some frail and transient goods of earth, for the solid possessions of heaven, alone worthy of her desires, as they alone are capable of satisfying them. How many advantages in one! Disengaged from those movements which degrade the soul, she can, she ought to collect in God alone, her affections and her thoughts; to make no use of her mind, but to adore Him; of her heart but to love Him; of her senses but to sacrifice them to Him; of her voice, but to sing His praises; of all that she is, but to consecrate it to His glory. She has generously trampled under foot, the idol of fortune, which blind mortals adore, to possess a real treasure, which, as St. Paul says, is a piety that is contented with what is necessary. Far from her, then, a false prudence, which would make her retain a small portion of the holocaust. Far from her a secret reservation, which would lead her to arrogate to herself, the right of disposing of something, and of procuring herself, gratifications and distinctions, odious in a place, where a perfect equality should reign. She has renounced all property, therefore she should desire nothing; like the sacred tribes, devoted to the service of the altars, which the Lord had especially reserved to Himself, she has no other portion to expect but God Himself; a precious inheritance of which nothing can rob her. Woe to her, then, if after having tasted the gift of God, she should fall back into the snare of her desires. Self-love greedy and timid, always fears to be in want. The more one takes from it, the more it endeavors to take back with one hand, what escaped by the other. It is inexhaustible in fine pretexts; it folds itself like a snake; it takes all forms; it invents a thousand new wants to flatter delicacy, and to authorize relaxation; it compensates itself in detail, for

the sacrifices which have been in general. It retrenches in a piece of furniture, a habit, or some article of dress, a book, a mere nothing. It holds to an employment a mark of confidence or of esteem, or a vain friendship. These things are for it, in the place of honors, riches, and ranks which the ambitious of the world pursue. Everything that savors of individuality, every sort of distinction, everything that consoles pride, everything that nourishes as remains of the natural life, and sustains this self, it seeks with great avidity; this it preserves, it fears to lose, it artfully defends. Far from abandoning it, when reproached with it, it cannot resolve to acknowledge it. It is more jealous on this point than a miser ever was of his treasures. Thus does it reduce poverty to a mere name, and change the great sacrifices of piety into mere illusions. Happy, then, the true spouse of Jesus Christ, who, always on her guard against her self-love, practises the perfect abnegation which her Spouse consecrated upon the cross! She has joyfully renounced all her pretensions in the world; she does not cast the least look towards what she has left, and what she might have hoped for. Her deprivation is perfect; there is no rapine in the holocaust. Poor in effect, she is also poor in will, by the renunciation of all that is created, of every natural talent, of even the most lawful treasure, and of which we are most jealous; I mean of her own judgment, her own wisdom. This entire privation, of the advantages and possessions of the world, is the first engagement of a religious.

In the second place, she is all to God; she can no longer hold to flesh and blood, or consult its desires. It is little for her to free herself from the tyranny of the passions, and to avoid their excesses. To unite herself truly, and to merit to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, everything in her must be subordinate to the severe rules of the most exact modesty. Her senses are subject to the spirit, and her spirit to God. Her eyes, closed to vanity, are open only to heaven; her lips speak only the language of the angels; her ears listen only to the wonders of the Lord, and to the truths of eternal life; her imagination retraces only pure and holy images; her heart, purified from every human affection, is a sanctuary

where Jesus Christ dwells in peace, and where He continues the sacrifice of His love; or rather, infinitely superior to her body, she keeps this in servitude; she gives it only what is needful to keep it from dying; separated from the flesh, though intimately united to it, she so abandons herself to Jesus Christ that she no longer sees, but by Him, she hears but by Him, she speaks by Him, she enjoys no pleasures but those which are found in Him. There is only one passion she cultivates; it is the love of her divine Spouse. This love rules over all her other passions; it extends to all places, to all times, to all her thoughts, to all her desires, to all her actions. This love forbids her all effusion of the heart, every marked predilection. "She loves nothing that her heavenly Spouse does not love," says St. Francis of Sales, "and what she does love, it is with no other love than His. By the august alliance she has contracted with her God, she knows that she is no longer mistress of herself. She belongs to Him by a solemn donation, of which a chaste and constant love has been the principle, and of which an inviolable fidelity must be the bond." Thus detached from herself to be all to her Spouse, she immolates her body for Him, as He immolated His for her. If she cannot offer her body, a bloody sacrifice as Jesus Christ did on the cross, because this advantage is for martyrs, she, at least, makes the sacrifice, which Jesus Christ offers for her on the Altar. Although there is nothing bloody in the Eucharist, our Saviour is there, as it were, in a state of death. It seems as if His soul was separated from His body, since the body appears without motion, life, or action. Thus she, herself appears. She is, as it were, dead under the veil which prevents her seeing or being seen; there is no motion, no action, which does not announce that the body is dead, and that it is the spirit which lives in her. But she carries perfection still farther. After having passed from the separation from all possessions, to the separation from the body, she proceeds from the separation of the body to that of the will, which is another engagement of her alliance with Jesus Christ.

All to Jesus Christ! she is no longer her own, to follow her own will. A faithful obedience consecrates her whole

heart to Jesus Christ, and He alone regulates all its motions. This obedience is more agreeable to God than any sacrifice, as He Himself says. In sacrifice He sees but the blood of animals flowing for his glory; by obedience, He sees flowing the blood of our own hearts. By obedience we immolate to Him our own souls. What a glory, for a Religious to subject the pride of her mind to the will of a God, Whom to obey is to reign! What an advantage for her no longer to use her liberty, according to her humor or caprice, but to have divested herself of it, in the hands of her superiors, the organs and interpreters of her heavenly Spouse! She uses her reason only to blind it and subject it to orders which may even appear to her whimsical and unjust. She has no longer, of herself, either sentiment, desire or self-will. Notwithstanding the good opinion, we naturally have, of our own sense; notwithstanding the defects which pride always discovers in those on whom we depend; notwithstanding the vivacity of passions and inclinations, which excite a repugnance for the things commanded, she acts, as if she neither saw nor felt any thing, and like a blind and insensible instrument, which has no motion but the will of him who employs and directs it. Thus divested of her own wisdom, she enjoys the true liberty of the children of God, who go, like Abraham, without knowing whither. Happy, because she no longer depends upon herself; that is to say, upon that blind and unjust master, who renders us independent of God, and proprietors of His gifts; she has no longer any will, any self-opinion; she does not examine the motives of her superiors; she discharges her conscience upon theirs; she obeys with the candor and simplicity of a child, and suffers herself to be conducted, without reasoning, foreseeing or inquiring. O how sweet is the peace produced by this happy self-abnegation.

Second Point.

Yes, Lord, I have promised Thee, and taken heaven to witness my vow I have promised to live for Thee in the practice of poverty, chastity, and obedience; and it is upon these conditions that Thou hast given Thyself to me, as my

portion and inheritance ; that Thou hast espoused me in faith, in the plenitude of Thy grace. But, O, my God ! I have abused Thy favors ; I have broken the alliance which Thou hast formed with me by failing in the word I have given Thee. Perfidious and unfortunate as I am, I merit that Thou shouldst reject and abandon me forever.

I have promised Thee, O Jesus, to imitate the poverty which Thou didst embrace for the love of me ; but alas ! have I not been more eager for trifles, than people in the world are for things of greater importance ? I have renounced all possessions, but have I not sought even superfluity, when it flattered my taste ? Have I experienced what it is to be poor like Thee, that is to say, poor by coarse food, poor by the necessity of working, poor by the simplicity of clothing, poor in all the details of my life ? Am I not, on the contrary, occupied with myself in all circumstances ? Have I not satisfied my delicacy either by preventing its wants, or by listening to self in the least infirmities. Far from leading a simple, indigent, active and courageous life, have I not sought to make for myself in the bosom of religion, a more comfortable state, than that which I left in the world ? What a scandalous greediness for the goods of the earth have I not shown, perhaps under pretext of the interest of the community ; as if the community was anything but an assemblage of individuals, who have renounced everything ; as if the disinterestedness of the individuals should not render the whole community disinterested ? Is it thus I have imitated Jesus Christ, Who far from being born in pomp as were the Cæsars, had only the stable for His palace, the shop of a carpenter for His retirement, the charity of the people for His means of subsistence, some alms for His riches ; Who, lying at first in a manger, had not afterwards whereon to rest His head, Who died naked and destitute on a cross ? How little conformity I have with Thee, O my heavenly Spouse ! What wants have I that are not satisfied ? Does my poverty share in the shame and dishonor, which almost always accompany poverty in the world ? Is not mine ennobled by its motive ; and does not religion, which is its principle, seem to communicate that air of greatness and dignity which belongs to

it? Is not that yoke sweet and light at which, perhaps, I murmur? Do I not find everything in the house without needing anything from without, not being exposed to the reverses of fortune, without being the slave of tyrannical customs, without any risk of losing, without any need of gaining, in fine, being very sure of never wanting anything, but a superfluity, that would give me more trouble than pleasure. Could I boast of finding more in my family? Would I not be poorer in the midst of my pretended riches, than I am here, after having divested myself of everything? O my God, give me a new heart! a heart worthy of Thee, a heart the enemy of all property; a heart which Thou mayest satisfy; a heart which delights in detaching itself, in depriving itself more and more of superfluities, desires and possessions. Instruct, touch, speak and make me feel, to the bottom of my soul, how happy they are, who are not attached to anything here below.

Oh precious liberty! which I enjoy by the vow of chastity, which renders me independent, as says St. Paul, of the tribulations of the flesh! I have chosen a Spouse, Who cannot die; in Whom I shall never see any shadow of imperfection; Who loves me, and wishes to render me happy by His love. I have only to fear not loving Him enough, or loving that which He does not love. But how have I observed this law of love, by which alone, a soul can be pure and worthy of the nuptials of the sacred Lamb? Has not my unfaithful heart been open to Thy enemies, O my divine Spouse? Chastity of the body is good only inasmuch as it produces that of the mind. Otherwise it would be reducing religion to a corporal privation, to a judicial practice. In subduing the flesh, have I rendered my spirit more free and more fervent in Thy love, O my God; and have I not sullied my heart by worldly affections? How could I thus irritate Thy jealousy, after so many promises of fidelity! How could I be tired of being Thine, since Thou art never tired of being mine! Could I become weary of Thee, in spite of Thy infinite perfections, when all imperfect as I am, it is Thy delight to remain with me, and to entertain with my soul a holy communication, an association, as it were, of interests

and possessions ! Ah ! Lord, render me faithful ; secure my frailty ; increase my strength in proportion to my obligations ! Grant that I may be more attentive to second the effects of Thy grace ; to correspond to Thy tenderness, and to guard carefully, the sacred fire, which should be burning at Thy arrival. Establish me forever in Thy love, and in the obedience I have vowed to Thee.

How many times have I failed in dependence on my superiors ; in the fidelity I owe my rule ; in that renunciation of my mind and will, which I have promised ? Have I not often yielded to my desires, my tyrannical pride and false wisdom ? Have I not a thousand times rebelled in secret against the yoke which I have assumed ; have I not murmured aloud or in my heart against the authority which governs me ? Or if, through policy, I have not complained, have I not permitted a silent chagrin to fill my heart, in place of seeking in a prompt and simple obedience, the calmness, repose, and peace, which are its fruits ? But, O my God ! is it not Thou alone I should obey in my superiors ? Is it not Thou alone, Whom I should see in their authority, the end and care of which are to provide for all my needs, to support me in my weakness to sustain me in my temptations and trials ? I must obey, but whom ? Charitable, compassionate persons, full of tenderness and goodness, raised in the school of Jesus Christ, and who, after His example, leave commands to the princes of the people, reserving to themselves only a ministry of grace and charity ; persons, who have no other privilege, than to observe the rule with more rigor, and to lighten it as much as they can to others ; persons, whom I would obey from inclination, even though duty did not oblige me ; persons in whom God permits defects only to correct mine, to humble and mortify my too sensitive self-love. How then can I withdraw myself entirely or in part from their authority ? I must obey, but what ? A mild rule fixed and invariable ; a rule which subjects the body less than the mind, which it keeps in perpetual vigilance, which is the way of salvation, the abridgment of the Gospel, the development of that abnegation which Jesus Christ recommends to all men, and in the literal accomplishment of which, says St. Francis of Sales, consists all virtue. How

could I seek dispensations, modifications, favorable interpretations, to explain them according to my liking? How could I suppose pretexts, imaginary inconveniences, chimerical needs to dispense myself? What have been the consequences? I have felt the burden because I have dragged it; I have bent under the cross because I have not carried it; I have been unhappy because I have not sufficient courage not to be so. Ah! then, should I not fear my own will, more than that of others, or rather more than Thine, O Lord? It is done, O my God! Happy to have only to obey, I will submit forever to Thy good pleasure. Every step in my career will be consecrated to obedience; they will mark my advance in the way of my salvation, since by this practice, actions, even the most indispensable to nature, will not be obstacles to my sanctification.

NINTH DAY.

CONFERENCE.—ON THE SPIRIT OF THE VISITATION.

“BLESSED are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.”—Ps. cxviii, 1.

Mayest Thou be eternally blessed, O Lord! Not only hast Thou separated me from sinners, but through Thy infinite mercy, Thou hast been pleased to associate me with holy souls who fear Thee, and whose only care is to walk in the way, which Thou hast marked for them. Every religious vocation is a grace, since it is a choice and predilection on the part of God. But among graces, there are some special ones, and among vocations there are some particular and more favorable ones. All have their marked perfection, but it is not the same in all, and some have degrees that are not found, or at least not so fully, developed in others. Now, such is the advantage of a vocation of a Religious of the Visitation; her Rule, which has been specially dictated by the wisdom of God, conducts her surely, and as it were, naturally, to the highest perfection.

Now, what is the spirit of this rule? Her holy Founder alone can perfectly instruct her on this point. "All religious orders," says he, "and all assemblies of devotion have a spirit that is general to them, and, moreover, each one has a spirit that is peculiar to it. The general spirit is the desire which they all have, of aspiring to the perfection of charity; but the peculiar spirit is the means of attaining this same perfection; that is the union of our soul with God, and with our neighbor for the love of God. We unite ourselves to God by uniting our will to His; and we unite ourselves to our neighbor by meekness, which is a virtue immediately dependant on charity. This particular spirit is certainly very different in different orders. Some unite themselves to God by contemplation, and live in great solitude, conversing as little as possible with the world, and not even with each other, except at certain appointed times. They unite themselves to their neighbor by means of prayer, praying to God for him. Some unite themselves to God and their neighbor by means of action, although spiritual. They unite themselves to God by instructing their neighbor, or by other acts of piety; and the better to do this, they converse with the world. They also unite themselves to God by prayer; but their principal end is what we have just said, to endeavor to convert souls and unite them to God. Others have a severe and rigorous spirit, with a perfect contempt for the world and all its vanities and sensualities; wishing, by their example, to inspire men with this contempt for earthly things, to which the austerity of their habit and exercises contributes. Others in fine, have another spirit. . . . But to proceed to the particular end for which our Congregation was established, and to comprehend more easily what is the spirit of the Visitation!—I have always judged, that it was a spirit of profound humility towards God, and a great meekness towards our neighbor. For, where there is less rigor for the body, there should be more meekness of heart, and where corporal austerity is wanting, there should be more perfection of spirit. Therefore, humility towards God, and meekness towards our neighbor must, with us, supply for the austerities that are practised by others. If austerities are good in

themselves, and are a means of perfection, they would not be good among us, as they would be contrary to our Rule. The spirit of meekness is so much the spirit of the Visitation, that whoever introduces more austerities than are now practised in it, would immediately destroy it, as it would be going against the end for which it was established. Thus humility towards God, and meekness of heart towards our neighbor is the true spirit of our Institute. By humility we unite ourselves to God, and subject ourselves to the exact observance of His will, signified to us in our rules. By meekness of heart, we unite ourselves to our neighbor, in an exact conformity of life, manners and exercises, doing neither more nor less than those with whom we live, and what is marked out for us, employing and limiting all the strength of our soul to do it with all possible perfection”

According to these precepts in which our holy founder has described himself, and which so perfectly characterize his worthy imitator St. Chantal, what must be the spirit, or rather the conduct of a true Daughter of the Visitation? Humility and meekness are her attributes. Humble before the eyes of the Lord, she sincerely loves obscurity and oblivion. She looks upon such a state as a happy preservative, and avoids everything that could draw her from it, and procure her any lustre. She heartily renounces all reputation for wit, virtue and merit, which could give her any secret complacency. She subjects herself with pleasure, to the least functions of the house, fearing those which are elevated, and to which some honor or authority is attached. In her humble retirement she says to herself what the royal Prophet said in humbling himself before God in the midst of his triumphs; I will render myself more vile in my own eyes, that I may be pleasing in those of the Lord. She sincerely loves dependence, submits to it with joy, and obeys with humble docility. She is neither presumptuous, critical, disdainful, odd, or extreme in her sentiments. She stifles rising jealousies, little researches after her own honor, vain desires of pleasing, of succeeding, of being praised, the fear of seeing others preferred to herself, the wish of deciding and acting for herself, the natural passion of ruling and of

making her opinions prevail over those of others. She forgets what she has been, to think only of what she is. She even rejects from her thoughts the worldly titles which she forgot in leaving the world; she renounces all the advantages which she might draw from her talents and knowledge. She never prefers herself in any manner, even to persons the most destitute of all those qualities, natural or acquired, that attract friendship and esteem. She prevents others in honor, by deference, and with sincere humility, looks upon them all as her superiors. In fine, nature is so completely destroyed by grace, that she always follows, in detail, the most simple and the most humble conduct. She is, in a word, as St. Chantal requires, the faithful expression of humility and simplicity; these virtues are the soul of all her actions. Whence come these humble sentiments of herself, asks St. Francis of Sales? They arise from the knowledge she has, that her fervor should as far surpass common piety, as that which God has done for her surpasses common benefits. She always sees herself very far from the perfection that is marked out for her as her end; could she then have a thought of self-complacency or self-esteem? She humbles herself, or rather she trembles at the sight of the multitude and greatness of her duties. She has to do with a God, whose justice she ought to fear, as much as she should confide in His goodness; and Who expects from her so much the more fidelity and return, as He has made her more gifts. The nothingness of nature, whence she has been drawn, and the nothingness of sin into which she may fall, incessantly present themselves before her eyes. She knows that if the Angels were lost in heaven, she may be lost in the cloister; that there is danger, not only at all times, but also in all places; and that he who does not fear the danger, is not far from his destruction. This is the subject of her meditation, and the motive of her humility. She considers that she holds everything from God; that of herself she is nothing; that if she is just, it is God who enriches her with His justice, and that if, during a single instant, she turned her eyes from her poverty, she would cease to be under the hand of her Benefactor. In these sentiments, she has no will

but that of others ; she receives no impression, but inasmuch as it is given her ; her obedience is blind, without reasoning, prompt without delay, joyful without chagrin.

So profound a humility is the fruit of prayer, the foundation of that peace which she enjoys with every one. "God resists the proud, and proud men incessantly resist each other," says St. Francis of Sales. Pride is incompatible with pride. Hence, arise those divisions and intestine wars that trouble so many communities, and the noise of which so often resounds in the world. But, in the Order of the Visitation, where each individual must humble herself profoundly, all necessarily concur to the harmony of a most perfect concert. Under the shadow of the same altar all, if they have the spirit of their Institute, have but one same heart, because they have but one same rule, which is that of humility. Their tranquillity is undisturbed, because self-love has no resource among them. Calm and peace reign there, because pride has no existence. Hence, what charity among the members ! What kindness in superiors ! What union of hearts ! Each one is eager to anticipate the desires of others, to smooth difficulties ; we remark there no disputes but those which rise from humility ; and, according to the thought of the prophet, peace flows there as a river, because justice and humble piety are there like a sea. What meekness, what goodness in her who commands ! Formed in the school of Jesus Christ, by the lessons of the most amiable of saints, before having been placed over others, she imitates the condescension of her Divine Master and the amiability of her holy founder. She rejects, discards from the authority confided to her all command and power, to show herself all patience and humility. By what ravishing charms does she temper the rigor of commands ; she carries all the weight of her power, and employs it only for the relief of those she governs. Such is, or ought to be, according to St. Francis of Sales, every house of the Institute. The assistance of charity, attention and foresight should be lavished there. The members should love one another reciprocally with a love which inspires that of duty, and renders it amiable. They should mutually support one another in trial, animate one

another in disgusts and bear the yoke together, to lessen its weight. Each sister should show herself sensible to the afflictions of others, and compassionate their sorrows. She should be attentive to their wants, assisting them in their weakness ; always ready to open to them her heart or to receive the affliction of theirs ; always disposed to increase the number of their days at the expense of her own. All should concur by their tenderness and charity, to secure to others this blessed result, this true consolation which makes the happiness of life and the enjoyment of an anticipated paradise. In a word, all hearts should be all the more intimately united, as they belong to the same Master, and the same interest and hope unites them. This charity does not, however, render them indifferent, or complaisant to the defects of others. It does not nourish weaknesses by flattering them ; but by the aid of advice, and wise counsels, it corrects with meekness, heals without making a new wound, redresses without aggravating, prevents faults or immediately remedies them. Charity, by which some interest themselves for others brings us near God, attracts his mercy upon the whole body. Each in particular offers her fervor, her vigilance, her mortifications, to repair and expiate the moments of infidelity and sloth into which, more or less all fall. Charity, which unites the desires and sighs of each sister, gives a new virtue and merit to the prayers of all. This charity renders the love of our neighbor more extensive, and more universal, by repressing those human friendships, those useless and dangerous effusions of the heart, those confidential communications which only serve to increase uneasiness, and excite murmurs. It represses those particular attachments that wound the general union ; those preferences that destroy an equality of affections, the only source of peace ; those private conversations, so injurious to common charity. This charity regulates the most useful friendships ; that is, an affection for certain persons, whose merit or eminent virtues distinguishes them from others. It teaches us to be moderated and reserved in these sorts of predilections ; it places them at the bottom of our heart ; renders them discreet, submissive and moderate, always ready to be sacrificed to the general law of charity. It permits them

to appear in the exterior, only in as much as is necessary to mark the esteem, cordiality and gratitude which we ought to have. Charity, places limits to the attachment we should have for the most zealous and perfect directors. It warns a religious against all excess, by reminding her, that since a director should serve only to accomplish the designs of God over her soul, and to glorify Him in her community, it is not permitted her to be attached to Him, but in as much as he produces these good effects, and with the simple view of the good he may do.

Such is therefore, the peculiar spirit of the Visitation ; a profound humility ; meek and universal charity ; and from these two virtues, all others proceed. In the Institute of St. Francis of Sales, pride must be a monster. The rules of simplicity are here laws, and laws are here manners and customs. In this congregation, distinctions are annihilated. The greatest is here the least, dependence is esteemed happiness, and abjection is here consecrated. In this assembly of the true children of God, there should reign a noble poverty, a cheerful penance, a polite severity, an amiable sanctity ; the most entire contempt for the world and all its customs ; the most profound recollection, and the most simple intercourse.

Such was the spirit, such was the life of the illustrious and holy Founder of the Visitation, of that man consumed in God by the fire of contemplation, whose interests were all employed in gaining souls to Religion. Such was the character of St. Chantal, who was as much distinguished by the elevation of her wisdom, as by the sentiments of her heart.

TENTH DAY.

FIRST MEDITATION.—ON PERSEVERANCE.

First Point.

“You are witnesses that you, yourselves, have chosen you the Lord to serve Him.”—Joshua xxiv., 22.

Joshua, when dying made a last effort to exhort the Hebrews to attach themselves inviolably, and with all their hearts to God. He wanted no other witnesses or judges than themselves. He called upon neither heaven nor earth, nor Mount Sinai, nor the Ark of the Covenant, nor the shores of the Jordan, nor the ruins of Jericho, nor the subdued nations, all irreproachable witnesses; but he said to them: “You are witnesses, that you, yourselves, have chosen you the Lord,” and that you have promised Him a constant love and worship. Thus, in a much stronger manner, God seems to say to the religious soul, upon whom He has lavished His favors during a retreat: “If every thing around you did not remind you of the engagements you have renewed with Me, during these days of grace and salvation, do you not hear within yourself a secret voice that tells you, that after having freely chosen Me anew for your God, your Spouse and your only portion, you owe Me the most persevering fidelity; through gratitude, on account of the benefits I have bestowed upon you; through justice, on account of the promises you have renewed; through the view of your own interest, on account of the dangers, that would follow a relapse. What motives for a religious soul!

In truth, what is more powerful than benefits to open and warm the heart? And what more signal benefits than the gifts and graces with which our Lord inundates a religious? What return of a lively and generous love! What protestations, what offers of service! What language of the heart, tongue and eyes! Do they not seem endowed with understanding to express the transports of gratitude with which they are penetrated? In these

movements of gratitude, the religious would do all for her Benefactor. She does not allow any of the circumstances that can enhance the benefit received to pass unnoticed ; she sees nothing equal to His generosity ; she cannot be silent, she cannot contain herself ; she would wish to render Him, if not a similar service, at least a veritable testimony of her attachment. If the children of the world are susceptible of such gratitude, what should not be the movements of the heart, the sentiments of the soul and the expressions of the love of a religious, for a God, Who, in retreat, has lavished upon her so many graces ? The greater the benefit, the more lively should be the gratitude. What more signal benefit than the help and graces our Lord bestowed upon her, after having drawn her into solitude ? What an abundance of lights have shown her all her duties, all her errors, all the beauty of virtue, all the necessity of penance, all the horrors of an unhappy eternity, all the malice of her faults, all the extent of the divine mercy and all the felicity of glory ? Is it not in retreat that she has penetrated into the inmost recesses of her heart ? and that, with the torches of faith and reason, she has discovered all the springs of her passions and their danger, the artifices of her self-love and its vain pretexts, the frivolous excuses of her nature and its cowardice ? Did she not perceive the false and specious reasoning suggested by her interest, humor and pride, whose deceitful brilliancy had been taken for the splendor of truth itself ? Is it not, in fine, in profound meditation that she has observed and conquered the many errors of conscience, which led her by means of false principles to erroneous consequences, and through ignorance, or want of reflection on the vows to negligence in keeping them, from negligence to relaxation, from relaxation to a fatal tranquillity ; thence to tepidity, and finally, from tepidity to real disorders ? God has not only enlightened her with the strongest lights, but He has also given her the most holy impulses, the most pressing solicitations of grace, the most tender invitations to sanctity. Oh ! what powerful motives to induce the soul to perfect herself more and more for the love of her divine Spouse ! What could our Lord do more to engage her to be faithful to Him ? Rich

and powerful as this God of goodness is, could He carry farther the magnificence of His benefits? And could this ever be sufficiently recognized by the whole life of this religious, which is consecrated to the most perfect fidelity?

To animate her to perseverance, nothing is better than to recall unceasingly the holy unction, the pure delights with which her soul was penetrated in her retreat: unction and delights, which, conceived in the heart, can be understood only by the heart that enjoys them. Is not such a recollection capable of renewing continually her fervor, of inflaming it with new ardor, and of urging her to fulfil, without change or reserve, the full extent of her obligations? But, if the benefits of her God should, as so many bonds, attach her to His service, and fill up, so to say, the measure of her duties, how many new motives in the order of justice should engage her to persevere in His grace.

What has passed between her and her divine Spouse in these days of reconciliation? To be restored to favor, she has given Him assurance of her fidelity for the future, she has formed resolutions, she has made promises, and it is after humiliating declarations, bitter regrets, that she has obtained so general a pardon. It was upon these conditions that the minister of God absolved her; and it was in the presence of God she repeated them. Now, after these solemn promises, sealed with all that is most august in religion, with the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ Himself, what an outrage would it not be to her God, and what a condemnation against herself, should she betray them? In the world, people make a religion of their promises; they would blush not to keep their given word; even if it be unjust, they are slaves to it, and will not break it. She flatters herself in the cloister, that she has a sensitive and tender heart for her sisters and for her God, to whom alone this heart should belong. She shows nothing but perfidy. She would violate, she would recall, even retract the promises that her sighs and tears alone should render sacred, if the respect due to God, to Whom she made them, did not suffice to prevent her from breaking them; in a word, she could so far forget herself, as to renounce them entirely.

But if duty and love have led her to the feet of Jesus Christ, why do not the nobility, vivacity, and delicacy, of the same sentiments keep her there? If she could overcome all that opposed her return, why cannot she overcome all that opposes her perseverance? If so many holy truths, which have impressed her in her retreat, if so many graces with which she has been penetrated are not capable of retaining her near God, why have they attracted her? or, if they could attract, why do they not retain her near Him? And will not God be always the same for her? Always equally great, equally amiable, equally worthy of her love and worship? His promises and His threats, His commandments and His decrees, are they not immutable like Himself? Why then should she change that which she has resolved on, after so many mature deliberations and reflections? If that which touched and frightened her should cease to make an impression on her, will it be less touching, less frightful in itself, or at the hour of her death? Will not the surprises of death be equally dreadful, judgment as rigorous, hell as terrible, eternity as long? At the last awful moment, will she not see things, as she has seen them in retreat? And besides, can she flatter herself that she can return to God, if she should stray again? Has she another retreat to make? more days to live? Even suppose that she has, will she receive more from God? Will she see better than she sees now? Will God again receive her? Will He not be wearied by her relapse?

Her own interest is another motive to animate her to perseverance. Reconciled with her God, and restored to His favor, she enjoys His gifts. Grace, so to say, covers her with its wings; but if by a shameful and serious relapse, if by a black perfidy she disowns her obligations, if by a new and deliberate ingratitude, she again outrages the divine mercy, will she not draw upon herself those terrible judgments which God exercises on inconstant souls? Our Lord weighs His graces, counts His favors, measures His liberalities. Will not an inconstant soul exhaust this source of blessings? Lazarus and others whom Jesus Christ resuscitated did not come twice from the tomb. Their transient resurrection was not repeated; their

second death was for them the last. We see, indeed, in the Scriptures, where sinners were converted, but as to relapsing sinners, it speaks only of their crimes, rarely of their virtues or of their penances. Why so dreadful a vengeance? It is because the sin of relapse offends God, outrages His perfections, despises His goodness, wearies His mercy, and irritates His justice in a more particular manner. It is because it adds a new ingratitude, a new contempt, a new perfidy, to all the crimes that have preceded it. It is because, according to Tertullian, it establishes itself as judge between God and the devil; it makes a reparation to the latter for having left him for God; it reproaches God for having pleased Him by leaving the devil, whom it esteems more than God; in a word, it repents for having done penance in order to be reconciled to God, a repentance as injurious to Jesus Christ as it is glorious to the devil. What chastisements does not such a sin deserve. We do not, however, wish to set limits to the mercy of God. The soul *may* rise again after relapsing, but she will have to overcome many difficulties: difficulties on the part of God, Who will, perhaps, refuse her His grace, or at least a strong and efficacious grace; difficulties on her own part, for, not being able to resolve to do penance, proportioned to her faults,—the weight of her bad habits will increase and become, as it were, a necessity; difficulties on the part of the devil, who, returning more furious than before, will resume a greater power and control over her who has again become his slave. These difficulties, in the state to which relapse has reduced her, trouble, astonish, overwhelm, and disconcert her. Thus, perhaps, by degrees, her reprobation will be consummated. Incapable of forming a fixed resolution, she will wish and not wish, she will resolve and not execute, she will begin and not finish. During these vacillations, time will pass away, graces will diminish, habits will be strengthened, sins multiplied, and the more she will commit them, the more she will wish to commit them. A false confidence will lead her to put off her conversion from day to day. From this delay, she will pass to the fear of having deferred too long, this fear will lead to distrust, distrust to despair, despair to hardness of heart,

hardness of heart to impatience, impatience to death, and death ! O my God, whither will that lead her ?

Second Point.

How much. O my God, are relapses to be feared ! How terrible their consequences, effects and chatisements ! What will I not risk, if I render this retreat sterile ? To what judgment will I not expose myself, if by desertion, I abandon Thee, O Lord ? What perfidy, what ingratitude, if by a deliberate relapse, I betray my promises and despise Thy benefits ! Ah ! it is done, and no longer as the transports of a passing fervor. I will commence and never again fail in fidelity to Thee. I am—it is true, and, in the past, I have had too fatal an experience of it.—I am of myself but weakness, levity, and inconstancy ; but, supported by grace, whose assistance Thou hast lavished on me, in this retreat, and whose sacred unction, power and supreme virtue, my heart now feels, what will not be my courage and perseverance ? I know all my misery, but abysed in Thy divine mercy, in which I wish to dwell, I will be faithful to keep Thee in my heart and to preserve Thy favors, by which I will profit. Thou wilt then abide in me and Thou, Thyself, will be my strength and constancy. What cannot I do with Thee ? I will overcome all obstacles, I will face all dangers, I will walk with a secure step in the midst of precipices. “ Courage,” says our holy Founder, “ will never abandon a soul who draws all her strength and generosity from Thy heart.” On the contrary, her strength increases in proportion as difficulties multiply ; it is inflamed with more lively ardor as stronger temptations present themselves. Such is the spirit which I desire, and with which I wish to be animated now and forever.

To encourage myself, and to avoid the misfortune of a deliberate relapse, I will apply myself more than ever to discover the illusions which have hitherto caused my inconstancy and wanderings. In seeking what has been the causes of my relaxations, I will take means and resolves never again to fall. What have hitherto been the principal

sources of my relapses? Has it not been my sloth and tepidity, which have not wished to do violence to self on certain important or difficulties occasions, and which make of continued virtue a monster and a phantom? Or is it not an immoderate vivacity, which does not wish to be constrained, and which unceasingly carried away by an excess of disgust or fits of fervor only entertains my caprice and humor? Is it not also the effect of my weakness and pusillanimity, which despairing of continuing in the practice of good, leads me through a weak diffidence in myself to leave it, after having commenced it, which or tells me not to begin, after having promised God, for fear of being obliged to abandon it, or, finally, which has made me take the most dangerous part for salvation, that is, no longer to make promises or resolutions, through fear of breaking them, an illusion which is the positive renunciation of perfection! In fine, is it not, perhaps, because falling into the contrary snare, which is a vain confidence in my own strength, God, to punish my secret presumption, permits that I should so often fall into the greatest infidelities, after the firmest promises and resolutions? Whatever it may be, whether tepidity or vivacity, I will overcome the one, I will restrain the other, because it is only by this care and these efforts that I can prove to Thee, O my God, that I love Thee with my whole heart. These promises will be sacred to me, because it is to Thee that I make them; heaven and hell will not make me change. To triumph over my pusillanimity, or my too great confidence in myself, I will distrust my constancy, but without weakness or discouragement; I will confide, in Thee alone, but without presumption; and, however firm I may be in the resolution I now take, I will be persuaded that, of myself, I will always be weak and, with Thee, always constant.

How have I wandered and what has been the source of my relaxation in the spiritual life? Forgetfulness of the greatness of my vocation and the duties of my state. To sustain myself in the austere life of my profession, I will not lose sight, either of the grace of my vocation, or the sanctity of my obligations. Servant, beloved Spouse of Jesus Christ, I will unceasingly recall my titles and my

duties, the fidelity that a servant owes her master, a friend her friend, a spouse her spouse. The faithful servant always acts as if she was under the eye of her master, considering as a theft every moment of time, which is not employed in the service of Him to whom she owes all. As a faithful servant, I will always walk in Thy presence, O divine Master, Who hast Thy eyes constantly fixed on me. The faithful friend always thinks of her friend, is never weary of serving her even in the least thing. So, O my Beloved, I will observe with constant fervor, the essential duties and the smallest obligations of my state. The faithful spouse has a heart only for her Spouse, and she occupies her mind but with Him, whether He is present or absent. So, O, my divine Spouse, dead to the world and buried in the cloister with Thee, I will banish from my mind and heart every other care but that of pleasing Thee!

Giving myself too much to exterior objects has often been the cause of my frequent relapses. Alas! how many times has the close union between my heart and my senses been fatal to me, so that I can say with Jeremiah, "my eye has ravished from me my soul!" In leaving my heart, I have fallen into relaxation; by incessantly returning to it, I will prevent new infidelities. I will live for the future, O my God, as though Thou and I were alone in the world! Solitude of the heart will be for me, what the mysterious Ark which floated on the waters of the deluge was to the dove. When my mind escapes from me and returns to the world, I will look upon it as out of its centre and element; always disquieted, it will repose only when I have recalled it.

The false idea I have formed of the little duties of religion has led me insensibly to neglect the greatest. I have regarded their practice as useless, under pretext that the perfection of virtue does not consist in fulfilling them. It is this false judgment, which, after having attacked regularity, led me to the greatest relaxation. Convinced now, that when an affair is of consequence, all that can prevent its loss is important, that from the little we pass to the great when we neglect it, I will never voluntarily transgress the least observance of my rule. I will permit myself nothing light, under pretext that it is not a great sin,

because everything is great before Thee, Lord, and what is little in itself is often of great consequence in the order of Thy eternal decrees. I know not if the grace of perseverance is not attached to this least observance, or if my loss does not depend on my contempt of it. In a word, as there is a strict union between the greatest and the smallest observances ; as the greatest depend on our exactitude in the smallest, and the smallest are useless without the great, I will act in regard to both in the manner in which Jesus Christ, Himself, has prescribed, acquitting myself of the great, and never neglecting the small.

How many other causes there are, O Lord, of my inconstancy in Thy ways ! The withdrawal from Thy sacraments, my tepidity in receiving them, and the little fruit I have drawn from them ; my weak or badly regulated devotion for the Blessed Virgin, Thy Mother and mine, my tepidity in learning and acquiring the perfection of my state, these have led me to such prevarications. I purpose, Lord, to meditate to-day on these great truths, that I may form good resolutions. I have been guilty of so many relapses, only because I have deferred executing promptly what I have promised Thee, O my God. Delay was a tacit resolution never to execute them. I will no longer permit the ardor of my resolutions or sentiments to cool. I will put them in practice from this moment, I will renew them from day to day ; every morning in prayer, I will recall at least part of them. I will habitually ask of myself a most exact account of them. If I have the misfortune to fall, I will immediately arise with confidence, and will draw advantage from them, because they will increase my vigilance and courage. Do Thou, Thyself, O Lord, engrave in my heart, in deep and eternal characters, these good resolutions. Grant me the grace to be faithful unto death.

TENTH DAY.

SECOND MEDITATION.—ON THE RECEPTION OF THE
SACRAMENTS.*First Point.*

“NEGLECT not the grace which is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy.”—I. Tim. iv., 14.

One of the principal means of rendering fruitful the grace of a retreat is a worthy reception of the sacraments. “These sacraments,” says St. Francis of Sales, “particularly those of Penance and the Holy Eucharist, are channels through which God descends to us, as by prayer we ascend to Him. Jesus has established them in His Church as abundant sources of all graces; each has its virtue. The sacrament of Penance is like a salutary piscina, which purifies us from all our stains. The Eucharist is like a heavenly manna which, nourishing our souls, should make them grow in perfection.” “Why, then,” asks our holy founder, “receiving so often these two sacraments, do we not also receive the graces, that are the effects of them?” “It is,” answers he, “for want of necessary preparation. Therefore, we must know how we should prepare ourselves to receive them. The first preparation is purity of intention; the second is attention, and the third, is humility. Now, the intention is pure, when we receive the sacraments that we may unite ourselves to God, and be more agreeable to Him, without any mingling of our own interest. The attention should be proportioned to the importance of the work. Confession requires a heart truly contrite, Communion a heart ardently loving. By this great attention, we do not mean that it is necessary to be free from every distraction; this is not in our power; but we must be careful not to dwell on such things voluntarily. The third preparation is humility, which is necessary to receive abundantly the graces that flow through the channels of the sacrament. Waters flow more swiftly and strongly when the channels are in sloping places. But besides these preparations, there is another important one, namely, a total abandon-

ment of ourselves to God, submitting without reserve our will and its affections to His dominion."

Purity of intention in confession consists in declaring our sins with sincerity, without exaggeration ; without embarrassing the confessor by long stories, or useless circumstances ; without excusing ourselves through pride ; without disguising our sins, without palliating them through bashfulness, without omitting what may change either the kind of sins, or render them more grievous. Now, as this detail should be very sincere, the examination should be extremely exact. We should demand of ourselves the most severe account of our conduct and earnestly implore the light of grace. The heart is an abyss of darkness and obscurity, and conscience is a labyrinth in which are to be found a thousand folds. How then can they be known if we are not enlightened by grace? Our examination must be severe, that we may be able to pronounce against ourselves, and not flatter ourselves in our own cause. How many form to themselves false consciences? They blind themselves on certain points, and decide without consulting on certain doubts, lest they become uneasy ; they do not accuse themselves of certain little weaknesses, because they do not wish to combat them ; they consider them as trifles, although these weaknesses often retard them in the way of virtue. Again, others disquiet themselves too much in the examination of their faults, under pretext of wishing to say everything, consequently, they are not sufficiently occupied with their contrition and the resolutions they should take. Scrupulous persons should take very little time for examination ; they should do it only a few minutes before confession, should never write their sins, and should obey their confessors in every thing. Otherwise, they would pass their whole lives in examination, in details of accusations, disquietudes without amendment, without affections, without love. This conduct should be pursued in confessions of rule and devotion, to which we are morally certain of carrying only venial sins, and to which we go to reanimate our fervor, to receive an increase of grace, to obtain the pardon of faults, to which our frailty exposes us, and the helps necessary to diminish their number.

After having entered the dark abyss of our conscience with lantern in hand, to discover the enemies of God and our salvation hidden therein, we must have a heart truly contrite. The sight of our sins should produce in our soul a lively and sincere sorrow, inspired by the Spirit of God, and conceived in view of Him. This sorrow should proceed from the heart, otherwise it would be hypocritical and insufficient for the validity of the sacrament. Sorrow should be sovereign, that is to say, superior to the sorrow caused by the loss of what naturally we love most. Contrition is a gift of God, obtained only by prayers and works of penance; and with grace, becomes the work of the soul, which excites herself to it by reflections on the grievousness and malice of sin. But although we should have this lively sorrow for our sins it is not necessary to feel it. Sensible sorrow is not always the strongest nor the surest. It may be the effect of temperament and a lively imagination. When we have done what is in our power, we must remain quiet. Excessive uneasiness and the desire of being sure of contrition, often arise from self-love, a secret pride and want of abandonment to God and confidence in His mercy. The senses are not the rule of sorrow, but it is our reason which measures it. We might have a more sensible sorrow for the loss of a relation, or friend, than for the grace of God; but, by reason, the loss of grace afflicts us more than the loss of a friend. One of the surest means to judge of the merit of our contrition is the nature of the resolution which accompanies it. If the resolution is feeble and the heart has no part in it, we may fear it is not sufficient, but if our determination to quit sin is generous, strong and sincere, then we have every thing to hope for. We have only to apply ourselves to give to our confession, the humility and confidence, which St. Francis of Sales requires from us.

Confession, according to Tertullian, is an act of humility that changes the eternal punishment of hell into temporal punishments. It casts the sinner down to lift him up, it accuses and excuses, it condemns and absolves him. By it, says St. Augustine, the sinner exclaims with David: "O Lord, I have not concealed my sin, but have

declared it, that Thou mightst conceal it." For, when man confesses his sin, God conceals it; when man conceals it, God manifests it; when man acknowledges it, God pardons it. Happy, then, the religious soul, who, regarding the priest as Jesus Christ, humbly prostrates herself at his feet, to be watered with some drops of the Blood of this divine Saviour. Happy, the soul who, not being ashamed to acknowledge her sins, asks, as her portion, confusion and humiliation. Far from disputing, or contesting with a confessor,—or under pretext of want of confidence, rebelling against well-regulated severity in a tribunal, which is that of the justice, as well as the mercy of God, she listens to his advice as if Jesus Christ, Himself, was speaking to her, avoiding that dangerous illusion of many, who, then, try to think if they have not forgotten some sin. Happy the soul who, after having confessed, receives the penance imposed with deep sentiments of gratitude, that God is contented with so slight a satisfaction for such grievous sins, and absolution in sentiment of profound and most perfect confidence in the merits of our Saviour, which are then applied to her.

The rules which St. Francis of Sales gives for confession are the same for communion. In the first place, besides purity of conscience, he requires purity of intention. That is, it is not enough for a Religious of the Visitation to purify herself from all mortal sin and all attachments to venial sin, for, stopping there, she would be but little touched by the grandeur of this adorable mystery. She must be purified from every affection, however light. She must be united to God and render herself agreeable to Him, through love of Him, without mixture of self-love. Were it a mere nothing that divided her heart, that nothing would be a barrier sufficiently strong to prevent her from receiving the gifts of God. It would exclude her from the holy familiarity with which He honors those perfect souls, who do not suffer in themselves the least desire contrary to His will. It would deprive her of that plentitude of sweetness, which they, who are free from all returns upon self, enjoy in the participation of the sacraments. It is something for the generality of the faithful to offer Him hearts free from

any great stains, and this present He condescends to accept, imperfect as it is. But, from the soul who is consecrated to Him, He expects a heart so divested of all earthly affections, of every too eager desire, that it is incapable of willing and desiring any thing but Him. St. Francis of Sales will not have his daughters disquieted, because they have no consolation either during or after holy communion. "If you consent to this disquietude, says he, "who does not see that you seek to unite yourself, not to God, but to his consolations, since your union with Him should be formed only by the holy virtue of obedience to His will."

"All your attention," continues he, "consists in emptying your heart of all things, that our Lord may fill it entirely with Himself. Certainly, the reason why we do not receive the grace of sanctification, which one communion well made is capable of imparting, is because we do not let our Lord reign in us as He desires. He comes unto us, this Beloved of our souls, and finds our hearts full of desires, affections, and little wills. This is not what He seeks; He wishes to find them empty, that He may be the Master of them, and govern them. To show how much He desires this, He tells his devoted lover to place Him as a seal upon her heart, that nothing may enter therein but by His permission and according to His good pleasure."

"Now, I know very well that the centre of your hearts is empty. Otherwise, there would be a great infidelity. I mean," says our holy Founder, "that we have detested and rejected not only mortal sin, but also every kind of bad affection. But alas! all the corners of our hearts are filled with a thousand things unworthy of appearing in the presence of this sovereign King, which bind His hands, and prevent Him from imparting to us the grace and blessings He desires to bestow on those He finds prepared. Now, is this having a heart ardently loving, a heart truly humble and happy in its own abjection? Let us, then, do all in our power to prepare to receive this heavenly Bread, abandoning ourselves totally to divine Providence, not only with regard to temporal benefits, but likewise to spiritual things. Let us

consider in the presence of the divine Bounty, if all our affections, desires and inclinations are subject to Him, and let us be assured, that our Lord on His side will accomplish the promise He has made us, of transforming us into Himself, and elevating our lowliness to His infinite greatness. You will know if you profit by the sacraments, by examining your progress in the virtues peculiar to them. Thus, you should draw from confession humility and the love of your own abjection, for such should be its effects, and it is always by the virtue of humility that we measure our advancement. Thus, you should become by holy communion more gentle, for this is the virtue proper to this sacrament, which is all gentleness and sweetness ; but if, on the contrary, you do not become more humble or more gentle, you deserve to have the Bread taken from you, since you will not work."

Second Point.

I see distinctly, O my God, that the principal cause of my relapses is the little preparation I make for the reception of Thy divine sacraments. I find myself always guilty of the same faults, and irregularities, the same tepidity, the same dissipation, the same want of charity, the same delicacy, the same sensibility, the same vanity, and the same self-love. I find no amendment, no profit by my confessions and communions. It is because custom and the Rule, rather than real piety and love of Thee have hitherto led me to them. Therefore, if I have not profaned them, I have cause to fear that I have rendered null their effects.

What have been my dispositions for the sacrament of reconciliation? Have I approached it to recover my liberty, or to forge new chains? to receive my justification or condemnation? To judge of this, how have I considered the examination which should precede confession? the sorrow which ought to accompany it? the resolution which ought to animate it? the satisfaction which should perfect it? the change of life and manners which are its fruit? Have I not contented myself with a superficial examination? Have I endeavored to discover the

sources and malice of my sins? Has the sight of my offences produced in my heart a lively and sincere contrition? Have I earnestly asked this gift of God? It should be interior. Have I not contented myself with making acts, in the formulas of which, my memory had more share than my heart. It does not depend on me to have that sensible and amorous sorrow which breaks forth in sighs and melts into tears. Thou givest this, Lord, to whom Thou pleasest, but if I had been penetrated with Thy love, would I not be at least deeply and interiorly touched for having offended Thee? If my sorrow has not been sensible, has it been at least spiritual, true, universal and sovereign? Has its motive been the love I owe Thee, O my God? Have I wept for my sin, because it is an evil? or rather have I not wept because I feared a greater evil? Has my contrition been superior to every other sorrow, and included a firm will and resolution? Have I sought to be morally certain of having true contrition of heart? Has not the habit of accusing myself of slight faults led me to conceive only a feeble sorrow for them, and to form only an imperfect resolution, although the confession of these venial sins without contrition and a good resolution is null, and renders me guilty of a real sin! Has sorrow for my faults been accompanied by a firm purpose, an absolute will, a strong and sincere resolution of never again relapsing? Have I not failed in sincerity in confessing certain faults, certain weaknesses? Or, falling into another extreme from wishing to tell everything, have I not often made my confession a diffuse narrative of a thousand things, for which I could not feel sorry? And, notwithstanding this cold recital, which I have dared to call confession, have I not often omitted to tell that which humbled me most? Have not my scruples, or other vain motives, led me to conceive a disgust against the confessor, or to contest with him, and to inspire him with fear of exercising well-regulated severity? How have I received and accomplished the penance imposed on me? Have I not solicited exemptions from the satisfaction commanded? Have I not treated the confessor's exactitude as rigorism, instead of making it a law to supply for his indulgence by works

of penance, proportioned to my debts? In fine, amendment of life is the surest sign, indeed the only good one, of a good confession. What, then, am I to think of so many and such quick relapses? What sin, defect, or imperfection, have I corrected? Has my heart no longer the same affections. Am I not subject to the same weaknesses? Have I not the same delicacy, sensitiveness and self-love?

My confessions being so defective, have I not cause to fear that my communions, have been, for the greater part, at least tepid? If I judge of them by the profit I draw from them, or by the disposition in which I make them, have I not cause to tremble? Oh! what a sad and painful acknowledgment, I must here make! I am sometimes in such dryness and aridity, that it seems to me I say nothing to Thee, O my God, either before or after receiving Thee. Yet, I go as others, and according to my Rule I present myself to receive Thee; and it seems to me that the only fruit of my communion is to make me tremble as to my dispositions in receiving Thee, and as to my sentiments after having received Thee. If it were a trial from Thee, suffering it with humility, I could say with confidence: "Thou wilt, O my God, that I remain before Thee and receive Thee without any sentiments, any enjoyment, may it be done to me according to Thy word. I am not worthy of Thy divine consolations, after having enjoyed too many natural ones; I make Thee the sacrifice." I would limit myself to tell Thee in the bitterness of my heart, that I am incapable of saying anything to Thee. But I would not cease to repeat that I love Thee and would always ask of Thee Thy divine love, without desiring too much to feel it. But are not the aridity and dryness I experience in my communions, a just chastisement from Thee, O Lord, rather than a trial? O my Saviour! I render to Thee all the justice I owe Thee, and also to myself; I do not prepare sufficiently to receive Thee before presenting myself at the holy Table, and, after receiving Thee, I am not sufficiently penetrated with Thy greatness; thence, my langour. Is it faith or love that is wanting to me? or rather, is it not both? If my faith were more lively, would not my love be more ardent?

and if my love were more lively, would not my faith, or at least my conduct, be more perfect? After so many communions, would I not be stronger in temptation, less impatient in trial, less inconstant in virtue, less obstinate in my defects, less filled with pride, self-complacency and self-seeking in all my actions? I acknowledge all the depravity of my heart, and as final perseverance is to be the fruit of all my confessions and communions, I must resolve to bring every preparation to them with the assistance of Thy holy grace.

At the sight of my past confessions, I understand, Lord, that I have had neither respect, love, nor fear for Thy divine Majesty, because any one of these sentiments would have prevented, or stopped my wanderings. To-day, Thou dost dissipate by Thy lights the darkness of my mind. Thou dost break, by the force of Thy arm, the stone of my heart, Thou dost pierce it with the darts of Thy love. My tears will flow night and day over the abuse I have made of Thy sacraments, and they will be my daily bread. Yes, contrition, love, sighs, sobs, and confusion will forever fill my soul. My penance shall equal that of the most illustrious penitents. In my accusations, O my God, I will remember that Thou art infinitely amiable, and can be offended by sin alone, and that I can best prove my love of Thee by hating and detesting it. When I acknowledge myself guilty, do Thou infuse into my heart the flames of Thy charity and the sentiments of that bitter sorrow which my iniquities cause Thee, that if I am unworthy of dying of love and sorrow, as Thou didst, I may at least long for Thee until my last hour, with a contrite and humble love. Grant me this grace that I may repair my profanations of the sacrament of reconciliation.

O Jesus! numberless are the outrages Thou didst receive from me in the sacrament of Thy love. I have eaten Thy Flesh without due preparation, through habit, through the duties of my state, and almost without distinguishing Thy Body, that heavenly Bread, from material bread. Perhaps, even, I have made no distinction between the days of communion and others. The same resistance to grace, the same tepidity in my exercises of piety, the same facility in committing my habitual faults has been

noticeable on communion days. Humbled, confused and contrite at my conduct, I will henceforth, O my God, take every care to prepare for Thee the dwelling of my heart, and to profit by Thy divine presence in the way taught me by my holy Founder.

TENTH DAY.

THIRD MEDITATION.—ON DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

First Point.

“BEHOLD thy Mother!”—St. John xix., 27.

Mary, the Mother of a Son, Who has God Himself for His Father, was given under the august title of Mother to all men, by that same Son, their divine Saviour. But may it not be said, that she is more especially by that gift, the Mother of a Religious of the Visitation, who is in a particular manner consecrated to her interests, her person and her very name? What a glory for a Daughter of Holy Mary! But the more distinguished her prerogatives the greater should be her devotion towards her Blessed Mother. This glorious Virgin protects her in a special manner; she should then honor her more particularly, and inspire all hearts with love and veneration for her. She is too enlightened to attribute to Mary a character of divinity, for she knows that she honors in her the graces and favors of God. But, how far must she extend this homage? Can she sufficiently glorify the Mother of her divine Saviour? Can her devotion be too marked for her, whom Jesus Christ has exalted in heaven and crowned with the rays of His own glory? Devoted to the service of this Queen of Angels and of men, in an Order where zeal for her glory is, as it were, hereditary, she should maintain and defend all her privileges. This love of Mary should be solidly established in her heart. This tender Mother should reign there with as much empire, and in a manner as fixed and invariable, as she does in heaven.

Otherwise, whatever honors might be paid her would be a vain ceremony. To be glorious to Mary and salutary to herself, the homage of the religious must be animated with the spirit; that is, after God, she must place in Mary all her confidence, must abandon to this good Mother all her interests, must have recourse to her in all her wants, regard her as her benefactress and, in particular as her Mother. In these two qualities, she must render Mary the most tender love.

Her veneration should not be limited to this; her particular devotion should be imitation. She should take Mary for her model, follow her as her guide, and make her life the rule of her conduct. This devotion is honorable to the Blessed Virgin, because it alone suits the plenitude of her merits. What, in fact, is more suitable to her honor, triumph and glory, than to be acknowledged, not by mere ceremony and barren eulogiums, but by real love, and generous efforts, as Queen of all saints, Model of all virtues? Woe, then, to the daughter of this august Mother, who, contented with respecting her, does not aspire to resemble her, who, idly admiring her sanctity, does not seek to imitate it, by endeavoring to do what she has done, and to become what she has been! Of what importance is it to me, might this glorious Virgin say to her, that you celebrate my feasts, publish my praises, honor my power, and revere my images? Filled with the bliss of heaven, I am insensible to the honors you render me, if they do not incite you to a desire of resembling me. It is for this, that I interest myself in your wants, assist you in your necessities, put to profit your good works and offer to God your prayers. His will is that you resemble me, that you regulate your sentiments by my maxims, and your actions by my example. How illy you correspond to my solicitude for your salvation, if, after seeing me elevated to the highest sanctity, you content yourself with a shameful mediocrity! You praise my generous efforts, and blush not at your own inaction. You congratulate me on my perseverance in good, and you waver unceasingly between good and evil. Ah! what an extreme disproportion between my life and yours. It contradicts all the honors

you pay my memory and degrades my name, which you bear. If you really love and honor me, imitate me, or cease to honor me, if you refuse to take me as your model.

To avoid such a reproach, a Daughter of Holy Mary ought, then, to apply herself to imitate what she honors in this amiable Mother. But this is not enough; each day, she should increase and perfect herself more and more in the imitation of her virtues, in order to correspond to the fidelity of this holy Virgin, who accomplished all that she knew from the first instant of her conception, never ceased to make progress, to advance from perfection to perfection, from the happy moment wherein she conceived the Son of God, until the awful moment, in which she sacrificed Him,—until the moment when, transformed into love, she abyssed herself in the love of God. Such ought to be the life of each of her daughters. There is no fixed point, where this faithful soul can stop, place limits to her fervor and be contented with her merits, saying to herself: “I have done enough.”

Second Point.

How unworthily, O Blessed Mother, have I carried out the views of my holy Founders, who were so perfectly devoted to you? How far am I from the spirit of my holy Institute, which makes a special law to honor and invoke you, to place in you all confidence, and above all, to imitate you? Ah! has my heart ever been well penetrated with the tenderness you have always shown me? Has it ever testified the gratitude due for your benefits to my soul? Heretofore, how have I honored you? With what spirit have I celebrated your feasts? With what zeal and affection, have I invoked your assistance? With what fidelity and attention, have I recited your Office? Has my devotion to you ever been sincere and well regulated? Content with praising you with my lips, have I not kept from you my heart? Zealous in defending your prerogatives, have I been as eager to imitate your virtues? After the honor of being a child of God, is there a greater honor than to be your daughter, O my holy Mother? O holy

Virgin ! your power in heaven and on earth is unlimited ; may it be thus over my heart. Yes, Lord, Whose sacred Body and Precious Blood, which Thou didst take from this most holy Virgin, I have received to-day, I promise Thee to honor, invoke, and serve her more faithfully ! I will, for the future, devote myself to study her virtues, actions and life, in order to conform to them according to my state.

O Mary, Virgin of predilection ! from all eternity you were present to the eyes of your Creator. According to Scripture, the abysses were not yet formed, the fountains had not yet begun to flow from the bosom of the earth, the hills and the mountains, which are supported by their own weight, were not yet created, and you were already conceived as the fairest work that was to come from the hand of God. Choosing you for the Mother of His Son, He determined to endow you more richly than all the rest of His creatures. Can I not say that this spirit of discernment, which was the principle of your happiness, has been the fount of mine also ? In the eternity of his wisdom and goodness, the Sovereign Creator was occupied with me ; He chose me from an infinity of creatures, who might have been and never will be. He determined the time of my creation and birth. He resolved to separate me from the corruption of the world and to conduct me into the bosom of religion, where He prepared for me graces proportioned to the august dignity of His Spouse that He was to confer on me. O Mary ! what was your gratitude, your fidelity, in corresponding to this excess of love, liberality and tenderness, on the part of your God ! Such shall be my gratitude, correspondence and fidelity, for the benefit of my creation and vocation. I shall be incessantly occupied with Him Who was occupied with me from all eternity. I shall faithfully correspond to that grace of distinction, which withdrew me from the world to consecrate me to my God.

The prerogatives which God granted you, O Immaculate Virgin ! when you were conceived, were an exemption from original sin and a plenitude of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. By these favors, you were preserved from the fatal waters of the universal deluge, in which we were all engulfed with our first parents ; your soul was filled with

supereminent grace, your body was ornamented with the rarest purity, your heart was confirmed in sanctity, your mind was enlightened with the light of faith. Therefore, the commencement, the course and the end of your life were so holy that there never was any blemish in you. What God did for you, O Mary ! is a sensible image of what He has done for me. He forearmed me, on entering religion, with a grace of preservation and a grace of protection. He chose me to be a vessel of honor in His house. My eyes, my body, all my senses, were sanctified by my consecration. The passions, and the cupidity which nourishes them, were weakened by the grace attached to the vows of poverty and chastity ; the levity and inconstancy of my will were fixed by the grace of obedience. How many helps have been given me to preserve these benefits ! Ah ! if until now I have not faithfully corresponded to such prerogatives, henceforth, I will do so with more care and vigilance.

O glorious Virgin ! the advantages of your birth were, not only to be born of the most illustrious parents, to count among your ancestors patriarchs, prophets, kings, high priests and conquerors, to inherit a blood which God had purified in the veins of so many saints, which He had made reign on the throne of so many kings, and to triumph in the persons of so many wise and valiant conductors of His people ! Your glory was not only to unite in yourself all the greatness of the empire, and all the sanctity of the priesthood, but also to be vivified by the same blood that was to flow through the veins of the Son of God, to have the same flesh, in which He was to be clothed and, especially, to contract with Him, by the grace with which you were filled, the most intimate union. What a holy use you made of your glorious privilege and of the graces with which you were inundated ! The day of your birth, O Blessed Mother ! should remind me of the day of my entrance into religion, which was, as it were, a second birth. Then I became, the daughter and heiress of my holy founders, who, by their virtues, were as illustrious in religion, as by their nobility they were, in the world. Here I dwell in a land purified by the tears of so many penitents, watered and tinged by the blood of so many martyrs of divine love, who made of their bodies living

victims immolated to their God. It should remind me also of the sacred day, when I became the daughter and Spouse of Jesus Christ, and contracted with Him the most honorable alliance. After your example, O holy Virgin! I shall cling to these privileges. Heiress of the titles of my holy founders, I shall also inherit their virtues. I shall not degenerate from the piety of so many virtuous sisters, who have preceded me, or who live with me. But, above all, I shall glory in belonging to Jesus Christ, in forming but one heart and one soul with Him and increasing, by my fidelity, the grace that unites me to Him.

In your Presentation in the Temple, O incomparable Virgin! you offered, at the same time, a daughter to the Eternal Father, a mother to the Son, a spouse to the Holy Ghost, a queen to the Angels, an advocate to sinners, a mediatrix to all men! You consecrated to God, without reserve, all that was most precious! You consecrated yourself by the bond of a perpetual vow, and with what love you kept this engagement! After your example, O most holy Mother! I have consecrated myself to the Lord by solemn vows. I have sacrificed to Him the world, my senses and my whole being. But has there been no theft in the holocaust? Have I reserved nothing of the spoils of the Amaleckites? I detest my infidelity. I will henceforth carry with love the yoke of your divine Son. I will no longer separate what is so closely united.

O solitary Virgin! in your retirement in the temple, separated from creatures, and united in mind and heart to God, you consecrated to Him all your movements, and perfected yourself by the exercise of pure love and all other virtues. You elevated yourself to the bosom of your sovereign Creator, Who, descending into your heart, purified it from all created things, and disposed you to become His temple. This solitude and retirement will serve as a model for that which I have chosen. I shall cherish my abode; I shall remain in it, solitary in body, mind and heart; I shall cultivate the holy and happy union with which God deigns to favor me. Empty of all creatures, dead to the world and to myself, I shall be occupied with God only. He alone shall fill my heart.

O purest of Virgins ! purity was the sacred bond that united your heart to the Heart of Jesus. In Him, you found the Angel Guardian of your virginity. Your two hearts were perfectly united, because you loved each other with a supernatural love, founded on the graces you have received from God, and on the love of Jesus, which was to be the indissoluble bond of your mutual tenderness. Your holy union retraces that which I have contracted with Jesus Christ ; purity is its bond, sanctity should be its fruit. I shall, therefore, purify more and more my body, my heart, my thoughts and my senses. No secret attachments shall occupy me and divide my affections.

O prudent Virgin ! the manner in which you conducted yourself in your conversation with the angel shall remind me of how I should conduct myself towards men. In my conversations with the world, I shall never withdraw from the eyes of the visible angel destined by religion to guard me. The most exact modesty shall regulate my looks and words ; I shall never ask curious questions ; I shall speak of holy things only ; I shall never forget my sacred character. No dissipation, no worldly manners, no effusion of heart, no levity, or vanity no complacency in praises, no lively and agreeable repartees. I shall especially avoid that secret joy of being applauded, which sometimes, under the cloak of an affected modesty, leads to a display of what should be hidden under the shade of the veil.

O charitable Virgin ! your zeal led you to the mountains of Judea to sanctify the house of Elizabeth and render her charitable service. There, you diffused joy, light and sanctity. Such shall be my zeal for the interests of God and the cause of religion ; such shall be my tenderness for my sisters, whom I shall love and serve in Jesus Christ and so, while edifying others, I shall sanctify myself.

O religious and faithful Mother ! your obedience to the law required you to purify yourself. A virgin, you offer a God to God as others were offered and redeemed by their parents. You obeyed not only the points of precepts, but you obeyed the law in all its rigor. Such shall be my fidelity to my rules. I shall listen to no false pretexts for dispensing myself from any of them. A vain human re-

spect, an unmortified desire of self-satisfaction, a false shame, a slight infirmity, the fear of appearing what I am, shall no longer lead me to infringe the least regulation.

O tender Mother! the loss of Jesus, which you met with in the Temple, shall teach me that He can be lost even in the cloister. There was no fault on either side with regard to His loss, for He withdrew only to try you. But is it not by too great liberty to my senses, by the voluntary dissipation of my mind, or by the secret attachments of my heart, that I have lost His grace and presence? Yet, has my criminal heart felt the bitterness in which your innocent soul was plunged? Like you, since I have had the happiness to find my God, I will never more abandon Him, or permit Him to withdraw from me.

O Mother of sorrows! your whole life was one of trial, privation and bitterness, but with what unshaken fidelity you passed through it! How invincible was your constancy on Calvary, assisting at the bloody sacrifice of your divine Son, Who was the salvation of the world! What a sword of sorrow then pierced your heart, but what were not your courage, intrepidity and fortitude! You shed tears, but they flowed with respect for the will of the Most High. You sighed, but no unworthy weakness had part in your grief. Overwhelmed as you were, you willed what Jesus Christ willed, the accomplishment of the orders of heaven, the redemption of the world. You fixed your eyes on that dying child of your bosom, Whom you loved so tenderly. You wept for Him, but did not oppose His sacrifice. Your generous sentiments, O blessed mother! should induce me to overcome my weakness and pusillanimity in the crosses and contradictions I so often meet. I shall henceforth offer to God my sensibility in infirmity, maladies, and sufferings, both interior and exterior, as a sacrifice of praise, honor and expiation, to obtain for myself, and those of whom I have reason to complain, the graces we need.

Finally, O Mother of love! in the space of time that elapsed between the death of Jesus and your own, you were incessantly united to Him in heart, by loving nothing but Him, thinking of nothing but Him, and acting only for Him. You never lost His divine presence a single moment

and after your example, O most holy Mother, I shall be closely united to Jesus Christ, and live no longer but for and in Him, as my holy state obliges me to do. It is by meditation that I can preserve this intimate union. Recollected in myself, I shall make a retreat of my heart, which I will no longer leave. I shall there erect an altar, on which I will sacrifice everything to my God. There, I will constantly pour out my heart in His presence; my mind will be uplifted to Him, and my soul will be unceasingly inflamed with the fire of His divine love. It is under your auspices, O Blessed Virgin! that I have formed these resolutions, and it is under your protection that I engage myself to be faithful to them. You know better than myself my many wants; you love me, and I beseech you to support me by your prayers in the efforts I am going to make to serve you. Will you, my blessed Mother! suffer all the graces you have procured for me, during this retreat, to be useless? No, you will not permit it, if I am faithful. No creature was ever so much beloved by God as you. No creature ever loved Him so much as you. No creature ever had so much zeal for His glory, or so much credit with Him for the salvation of souls. It is, therefore, by your admirable prerogatives, by your virtues, O divine and tender Mother, that I conjure you to obtain for me the grace of a holy and inviolable fidelity.

TENTH DAY.

CONFERENCE ON RELIGIOUS PERFECTION.

“ARISE, eat; for thou hast yet a great way to go.”—III. Kings, xix., 7.

This discourse which the angel held with Elias, is that which Jesus Christ addresses to a religious after her retreat. “Hitherto,” he seems to say to her, “you have stopped in the way. Even your steps which should have tended towards Jerusalem, have been directed to Babylon. Arise, there is not a moment to be lost. Fortified by the

bread of the strong, with which I have fed you, animate yourself with new courage, and walk on to Mount Horeb, where I will await you. Hitherto, you have shown good desires without effect, fine resolutions without execution, good works without integrity and perfection. Time is short, it passes rapidly; the greater part of it has elapsed, and but little remains to you. Therefore, collect your strength, redouble your steps in the way of virtue, and advance incessantly, that you may gain the palm that I destine as the reward of your combats. Arise and walk, for there yet remains a great way for you to go."

These words, upon which St. Chantal often meditated, animated her with the most ardent zeal for her own advancement towards perfection, and for that of her daughters. Consumed with a divine fire, she often said to them: "Oh that I had a flaming dart to enkindle in your hearts the love of perfection and virtue, which your vocation requires. You are more obliged to this perfection," added she, "because you practice a rule whose easiness should humble you, and you should replace by a more ardent love of God and an adoration purely in spirit and in truth, the great austerities practised by the saints."

Woe, then, to a daughter of this holy Mother, who counts her progress in the ways of God, who seeks to smooth the path of her salvation by dispensations, which would only render it less sure and even more difficult. The least attention to the way we have already made retards our progress, and, to look back on a steep road, before we reach the top is to risk being precipitated. Perfection disappears when we think we touch it, and the most eminent degree of sanctity does not hinder us from being useless servants. If St. Paul, loaded with the merits he had acquired in the course of his evangelical preaching, counted as nothing what he had done, if he only looked before him to see the way that remained for him to go, if he was only occupied with the care of incessantly advancing, what sentiments should the religious soul have, who, perhaps, has not yet commenced in good earnest the work of her sanctification, or, if she has undertaken it, is yet so far from its fulfilment? What an illusion if, after slight combats, she should

sigh for repose ; if she should rejoice that she has done much ; if she should imagine that, without doing anything more, she has a right to expect the reward which God has promised to those who labor, conquer and persevere to the end ? What then ? Has she no more passions to subdue ? no more inclinations to combat ? no more defects and habits to eradicate ? Has she no more enemies to fear ? surprises to avoid ? temptations to prevent ? self to subdue ? Has she no more humility to acquire, meekness to practice ? no vigilance to increase, functions to fulfil, charity to exercise, new degrees of divine love to obtain ? She has virtues, but how weak and common would they appear to her, if she knew how to appreciate them ! In what do her merits consist ? Alas ! at most, in a sort of piety which sees itself favored by God, and applauded by creatures : in a patience, which has but little to support ; in a humility, which seldom meets with humiliation ; in a poverty, to which nothing is wanting ; in a glorious obscurity that shuns the honors of the cloister, and is, perhaps, sought after ; which, pursued by the world, from which it has fled, draws its esteem and praise from the very contempt it has for it ; in an easy obedience that accepts what it has chosen, executes what pleases it, and finds in the facility of the command the price of its submission ; in a convenient mortification, which retrenches what incommodes, renounces what is hurtful, and which, in its real and meritorious pains and privations, has still the consolation of virtuous minds that admire it, and tender hearts that pity it ; in a charity fruitful even in its disinterestedness, which meets with a grateful return, and is compensated for the good it performs, by the pleasure it gives and receives ; in a word, in a sanctity rewarded in advance, though it has not yet the enjoyment, but only a foretaste of it ; which gathers the fruit of justice in the abundance of peace, and which, as it were, prepares its crown in the sweetness of repose. But if this religious soul, who, perhaps, thinks that she sees in herself the pre-eminence of merits, were tried, would she not cease to be humble ? If she were really poor, would she be perfectly detached ? If she were sensibly afflicted, would she still be patient ? If she were in an entire obscurity, would she cherish

abandonment? If she were constrained to an inconvenient austerity, would she practice mortification? If she were in want of everything, would she love poverty? If she had to suffer everything, and from every body, would she joyfully consent to it? If she were obliged to everything that could be commanded, to fulfil certain disagreeable functions, what would be her obedience? If she had to sacrifice everything without any prospect of reward, or gratitude, what would become of her charity?

Is it not, however, in the assiduous exercise of these painful virtues, or, at least, in the disposition of practising them, that perfection consists? Is it not in a life always fervent, notwithstanding the crosses and obstacles that may interrupt its course, that true sanctity consists? Is it not in going to God, in the midst of the obstacles, which so often cool or destroy her fervor, but also in making new progress in the manner of fulfilling her duties and in increasing grace, which faithful correspondence doubles at each moment, that true justice consists? St. Paul so often invited the primitive Christians to advance continually in good. He was persuaded that grace only subsists by efforts to increase it, and that it is insensibly lost, as soon as we cease to add to its measure by vigilant fidelity, in corresponding to all its motions. Woe, then, to a religious soul, in whom this grace should be sterile, because where grace produces nothing, there certainly is no longer grace. It is stifling its germ to cease to put it to profit and to acquire continually a new plenitude. In point of virtue, not to increase is to fall off. It being the essence of charity to tend to perfection, not to wish to increase it is to consent to its being extinguished. In fine, to be satisfied with the measure of one's charity is not to have even its beginning. "The religious state," says St. Francis of Sales, "is a way in which we must either advance or go back. It is the little seed in the Gospel, which continually grows and insensibly becomes a large tree. It is a continual progress in the narrow path, notwithstanding all pains and discouragements, imitating in this the rivers, which are never wearied in their long route. Although they meet with rocks and dikes in their way, they advance continually, and roll their waves one

after the other until they enter the vast bosom of the sea." "Thus," added St. Chantal, who, penetrated with these sentiments, made a vow to do what she knew to be most perfect, "thus a true Religious of the Visitation, in her course from earth to heaven, advances without relaxation in the sacrifices of religion." Every day, she becomes more humble in her sentiments, more reserved in her words, more recollected in her employments, more docile in her obedience. She does not imagine that the years she has spent in religion give her the privilege of indolence or relaxation. She runs without stopping, and every step she takes advances her in her career. Animated with divine love, she rises each instant from virtue to virtue, grows in grace and wisdom, makes new progress in the manner of accomplishing her duties, seeks our Lord in the most common exercises. She applies herself each day to the examination of her thoughts, regulating her heart, as if she had done nothing in the past; each day, she makes a new advance, and runs with a firm and rapid step in the holy way. How many merits for this heroic soul! They increase in proportion to the grace which actuates them, and grace, in its turn, increases in proportion to the good use she makes of it.

How elevated soever this soul may be in virtue, she is still marked with the seal of infirmity, and is not sheltered from imperfections, frailty, or surprise. Through that kind of fatal necessity, which is attached to the human condition, she experiences weakness and languor. There is no life so beautiful, as not to have its blemishes, no soul so strong, as not to have its weaknesses, no heart so fixed on heaven, as not to have its variations; therefore, she has her defects and imperfections. But for this very reason, she redoubles her steps in the way of virtue, to remedy by her assiduity, vigilance and fervor, her unhappy disposition to evil. She knows that she does enough, perhaps to satisfy the duty of public edification, to fulfil the indispensable duties of her state, to diffuse about her the odor of her virtues, but she is intimately persuaded that she is yet far from doing enough to complete the great work of her sanctification, to insure the merit of a holy and happy death. She knows that life is a voyage,

that as long as we walk in the way, we are not at the end, which we must approach from moment to moment ; that time is for our trial, and that as long as the combat lasts, success is doubtful, and that as long as there is an enemy, we must fight. Humbled under the weight of her misery, the religious can never turn her eyes away from it. She laments her faults and labors to correct them. Her conscience reproaches her with the least imperfections, some actions performed without motive, some too disquieting solicitude, some slight murmurs, some momentary vanity, some worldly manners, some little attention to her convenience. She accuses herself of infidelities, if she has yielded to distractions, when tepidity or passion has placed a thick cloud between heaven and her prayers ; if rebellious thoughts have arisen in her mind and passed to her heart ; if her lips have uttered some bitter words : if she has turned her thoughts to the world, which she should absolutely forget ; if she has not promptly disavowed importunate thoughts. She accuses herself if she has taken back in desire the smallest portion of what she has sacrificed by her vows ; if by want of application to Jesus Christ, to Whom she should always be united, and Whom she should always desire to please, she has suffered some of her actions to be lost ; if she has despised the least duty, or neglected to repair the least fault ; if she has made a slight infirmity the foundation for exemptions and dispensations ; if she has returned from prayer and from the holy Sacrifice less meek, humble and obedient ; if she has not placed a guard of circumspection upon her lips, to watch exactly over her words ; if she has made her sisters feel the weight of her humor ; or if, valuing herself perhaps too much on account of the sanctity of her state, she has not drawn from it the consequences and motives that engage her to greater sanctity of life. With what sorrow and bitterness does her conscience reproach her with these faults or omissions ! With what promptitude does she recur to the tribunal of penance, to discover to a wise physician her recent wounds ! She confesses her weakness, not only to the Lord and His ministers, but also to her sisters ; she uses every means to efface them. How eloquent she is in explaining the enormity of her falls !

she judges them with rigor, and punishes them without mercy. Her faults, far from interrupting her course, only serve to make her redouble her steps. They even serve as a means for her to advance towards her end by the humiliation they cause and the penance she does for them. Such is the conduct of a truly religious soul. But how deplorable is that of a tepid soul, who, contented with her mediocrity, beatifies, as it were, her imperfection; whose piety is exhausted in projects, whose devotion consists in demonstrations, whose days are passed in speaking of heaven, but which, far from fructifying for God, show but an abundance of leaves, when the axe is already at the root of the tree! Hardly entered on her career she has not, perhaps, defeated a single enemy, conquered a single passion, and already she congratulates herself upon the triumphs and victories she has gained. She imagines she is already touching the end on account of the length of her prayers, and the agitation of her scruples, and she has done nothing but turn herself around, making a circle of occupations and exercises, which she has almost always referred to her own views, her self-love and convenience, instead of referring them to God. Far from animating herself in her career, by fearing for her works, watching over her steps, or lamenting her corruption, she is satisfied with paltry virtues. Far from growing in grace, she has stopped at the first step, she has relaxed in fervor and perhaps this relaxation has dealt the fatal blow. As one, who is swimming against the current of a rapid river, cannot interrupt his efforts without being carried down by the tide, so, ceasing to struggle against her own heart, which is her mortal enemy, neglecting the helps which religion offers, she has, perhaps, fallen at the first degree of virtue. On a good beginning have followed infidelity, languor, and a dreadful lethargy, which threaten her with approaching death. To a golden head, she has joined clay feet, and at the slightest shock, the statue will fall. This vineyard so happily planted, so carefully guarded, no longer produces anything but sour fruit, and it will soon be abandoned. We expected to find deep in the earth, the sacred fire hidden by the prophet, and it is but cold muddy water, which will be cursed. Isaac, laden with

the wood and fire for the sacrifice, asked where was the victim; here, on the contrary, we see the victim and do not see any fire. The spirit of fervor that vivified this soul is extinguished; there are no longer but prayers without attention, works without love, conversations without devotion, crosses without unction, sacraments without fruit. She takes every sigh for devotion, every sin for temptation; from a little negligence, she easily passes to a greater, from an omission to a declared prevarication, and now, the heavenly dew ceases to fall on this chosen mountain which has become sterile. Thus, by the most terrible chastisement, as soon as this religious soul, ceases to produce fruits of life, she produces gradually and insensibly the fruits of death; that is to say all her actions are dead as to merit, dead as to reward, dead for time, dead for eternity! What a deplorable state!

What a difference between an unfaithful and a faithful religious! The latter vigorously maintains the edifice of a spiritual and perfect life, the former yields almost every moment under the weight of the slightest observance. One overcomes all obstacles and walks rapidly towards sanctity; the other is tired, and stops at the commencement, like those languid sheep that follow the flock at a distance; everything is burdensome, everything is painful, even the sweetness of the law. The one receives every moment a new increase of merits from the sacrifice she first made; the other, imprudent and slothful, sees taken from her, through her voluntary negligence, the greatest treasures in the midst of abundance. Letting pass idly by the blessed days of the richest harvest, she soon finds herself with empty hands in the presence of the sovereign Judge. The one finds the yoke of the Lord sweet and light, because she carries it with love; the other finds it hard, because she drags it, as it were, not yet having habituated her mind and heart to bend under the amiable burden.

Piety leaves in the soul a taste in proportion as it is practised; it gives a holy habit of doing good which facilitates its accomplishment; every day, it smoothes more and more the way of perfection. "Contract, therefore," concludes St. Francis of Sales, "the holy habit of

fidelity." "Let each one perfect herself according to her vocation, and your particular vocation is to exercise yourselves in all virtues, and mutually to animate each other to a union with your heavenly Spouse." He says elsewhere that a religious profession is a sacrifice of holocaust, in which by an entire and perfect immolation, the soul gives herself to God. The Lord has chosen her to retrace the charity of the primitive christians, their poverty and their renunciation of all earthly possessions; the zeal of the apostles, the intrepidity and firmness of the martyrs. In fine, that she may give herself in a more perfect manner to Jesus Christ, her fervor and zeal should be so ardent that, if it were possible to find a more perfect manner of uniting herself to Him, she would embrace it. In a word, she should set no limits to her perfection, imitating the holy angels, living only of God and for God, by an entire consecration of herself to Him, so that He may reign sovereignly in her. Her perfection ought to be the end of all her exercises, and she ought to have a continual care to advance therein, and how? by the perfect observance of her Rule, remembering that, to attain it, it is necessary to know little, think little, desire little, speak little, but to do and suffer much for God. "Thus," he adds in another place, "to bring to a single point of view the whole extent of the perfection of a daughter of the Institute; she should never wander from the way which is marked for her; she should walk therein with the greatest exactitude, without turning either to the right or to the left, referring all to a punctual observance of all that belongs to the Institute; never admitting anything contrary thereto, assured as she should be that, though it be good for others, it would not be so for her. Let her remember always that exactitude in practising her Rule is so necessary, that once the bond of respect and obedience is broken, all will go to ruin."

What more clear, more precise and more consoling for a Religious of the Visitation than these precepts of her holy founder? All her perfection consists in observing faithfully according to the spirit and the letter a Rule, which assigns all her duties, directs all her steps, details all her actions, measures all her words, desires and intentions; a Rule which not only contains for her the whole

Gospel, but the spirit, sanctity and even the perfection of the Gospel; a Rule emanating from heaven itself, sealed with the seal of the Church, and as an infallible consequence, the certain pledge of God's Will for her. It is a Rule, not only holy, but sanctifying, whose end and effect are to perfect her soul, according to God, to keep her in an intimate union with Him, to enable her to discover and contemplate the greatness of God, to inflame her with love for Him, to humble and annihilate her before Him, to render God always present, so that she finds Him in all, sees Him everywhere, is all His, as He is all hers. Finally, it is a Rule so perfect, that not only she should be its disciple by her inviolable exactitude, but its firm support by her example. More than this, she should limit herself to it, without adding or omitting anything, "having no other care," says St. Chantal, "but that of depending on it; to do otherwise is one of the most subtle illusions of the tempter. It is not always as a spirit of darkness that he attacks religious to turn them from the practice of the Rule." To certain souls, he transforms himself into an angel of light; if he cannot make them neglect the Rule by relaxation, he leads them to do so by an excess of badly understood fervor; that is to say, he leads them to a pretended sanctity above the Rule; he proposes works more perfect in appearance, but incompatible with exact observance of Rule; he persuades them to do more than they ought, and fail in what they should do. Fatal singularity which, according to St. Francis of Sales, who was as much opposed to this, as he was friendly to simplicity, is the daughter of pride and hypocrisy. It is a refinement of vanity and self-love, which withdraws from the ordinary and trodden path, only to distinguish and satisfy self, which takes for the movement of grace and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the whims of humor and caprice. Far from a Daughter of the Visitation such wanderings and similar mistakes. The foundation of her perfection is her Rule, since this Rule is for her the Will of God, and nothing can be holy but what God wills, not that the Lord reproves the ardor to advance, that accompanies the rule. Such works are good and praiseworthy in themselves, but after all, they suppose as the necessary and preliminary foundation, the

accomplishment of the Rule ; they are good but inasmuch as in observing extraordinary practices, there is more fidelity to the common exercises. Why? The reason is evident. It is that the rule is of obligation, any thing further is of supererogation. According to the precept of Jesus Christ, the religious should commence by duty, without omitting anything else that her state and strength permit.

Thus to conclude by the most useful, perhaps, of all the words of our holy Founder, and which resume in a few words all that has been said in this retreat: "A Religious of the Visitation should seek her sanctification only in her Rule. All her perfection should be limited to lead a life always simple, equal and uniform ; to accomplish the observances and most common and ordinary practices, with new and increasing love, sustained by a holy strength and generosity, which keeps her soul always elevated above the senses ; which makes her act in all by the movement of grace, which tends to overcome and mortify more and more her humors and passions ; which renders her constant and faithful amid all her disgusts, dryness, temptations and difficulties ; which keeps her constantly in the solid practice of all virtues ; which gives her a patience proof against injuries, sufferings and contradictions ; a sincere and profound humility that is preserved amidst contempt, confusion and abjections ; a meekness and equality of humor, notwithstanding the inequality of sentiment, events and occupations ; which makes her obey in all things with simplicity, promptitude and exactitude, notwithstanding all the repugnances of nature and humor.

SUPPLEMENTARY
MEDITATIONS.

MEDITATION.

GOD OUR END.

“God being our only end, and we, having been created but for His glory, should in all things think of Him, and sacrifice everything for Him.”

First Point.

Let us regard ourselves as nothing before the infinite Being of God, and supplicate Him to give us a knowledge of His grandeur, and of our own nothingness. God, all holy, powerful, and perfect in Himself is pleased that we should offer to Him, at every moment, the sacrifice of our actions; that our greatest and only aim should be to offer Him a continual holocaust. O! what an honor to man, that this omnipotent Being should condescend to accept his services; that He should wish to make him a partaker of His glory; that He should have created him for no other end! Yes, what an incomparable honor, that He should deign to regard our every word, every thought, every look, every sigh, every act, as so many subjects from which He can draw some pleasure, some honor! Could man, dust and ashes as he is, receive a greater privilege than that of being made capable of increasing God's glory? There is no creature which should not be willing to sacrifice itself for the glory of God; and there is none, which does not daily consume itself, as it were, to glorify God, and to render homage to Him, as to its principle, its last end. Animals, plants, and all nature are gradually consumed by time, to show that they have no being, but what they have received from God, and, that what they have received must be returned to its source, its origin, and its last end. Should man be the only one, to refuse this homage to God; man, who is the king of all creatures, the first of beings on earth; should he be the only ungrateful one, because he is the most reasonable of beings? Ah, no, for we are too deeply impressed, dear Lord, that we are Thy work and come from Thee, and that

there is nothing in us that does not belong entirely to Thee. O religious soul ! dost thou comprehend that all in thee must be restored to its author ? That every action of thine, must be referred to Him, as a sacrifice that is justly due to Him ? That all the movements of thy soul, of thy body, of thy heart, and of thy senses, must be offered to Him in a spirit of immolation ? Let us spare nothing for this God of love, whose only design is to crown us with glory for all eternity ; let us only aim, during these few short years, perhaps hours, of time, to glorify Him, by even the very least of our actions. Let us consume ourselves by little and little, and spare nothing that will make us acceptable to this God of mercy and love.

Second Point.

Let us reflect sincerely upon the past, to see if our life has corresponded to the designs of God in creating us. To what have we given our cares ? To the creatures of God, perhaps, who have nothing of their own to return to us,—to vanities, to pleasures, to idle conversations and amusements, to perishable things. How much of our life has been given to God, Who had claim to all ?

Ah, religious soul ! enter, but for one moment, into serious reflection, and you will find that there is in the inmost depths of your heart, a secret inclination, that would have led you to seek God in all things, if you had only been attentive to it. Time is now given you to repent of the past ; will you be so unreasonable as to waste it ? Everything reminds you, that all must be returned to Him, from Whom you have received all, and that you are fast approaching the end of your earthly life. Infirmities, sickness, the rigors of the seasons, advancement of years all remind you, that your body is tending towards its centre, and by its gradual consummation, seems to say : “ Yes, my God, I will be annihilated, I will return to dust and ashes, to acknowledge, thereby, that I have been formed by You out of nothing, and that I must return to my centre.” God has made us for Himself only, and we have dared to make use of His gifts, as though they were ours by just claim or right. O

unhappy mistake! I will, however, try to repair the injury done Thee, O my God, by never disposing of a single moment of time, except for Thy glory. I will keep myself in a state of annihilation before Thee. I will remember my last end, and desire that every moment, every hour, every act, every thought and wish, my body, my senses, my soul and all its powers, may all be immolated to Thee, to Thy glory and pleasure, so that I may possess a spirit of sacrifice, that will finish only with my life.

Alas, my God! how far am I from the perfect dispositions of Thy saints, who spent their whole lives in a spirit of immolation, in a continual sacrifice of all that was most agreeable to them! The world thinks not of Thee, my God, and I can share with it, in the reproaches Thou makest to it, for I have been more criminal, having received so many graces not granted to the world. But, henceforth, I will be a changed being, or rather I will have no being but Thine. I will, as a soul of holocaust and sacrifice, regard in silence, peace and adoration, all that passes around me, and make all tend to Thy glory and my sanctification. I will accept, in a spirit of submission and humility, the destruction of my body, and offer it as an homage to Thee, my sovereign good, my last end. I will rejoice to see this tenement of clay returning to its origin, dust and ashes. I will rejoice with all creation in rendering this homage to Thee. I will repine at the loss of nothing, and will make it my chief pleasure to think of Thee at every moment, to offer all to Thee, and in a word, to live a life of sacrifice, never forgetting that, in proportion as I abase and humble myself, Thou wilt be glorified, and my soul sanctified. Thou hast created me for Thyself alone, and to Thee I will and must belong for time and eternity.

MEDITATION.

ON THE SHORTNESS OF TIME.

“FOR behold short years pass away, and I am walking in a path by which I shall not return.”—Job. 16, 23.

First Point.

There is little need of much reasoning to be convinced of the necessity of employing well the time which our Lord has given us. It suffices to say that we have but a little while, and, in this little while, we have great things to perform, great affairs to settle. You have already spent many years on earth, many years in which our Lord has pressed you to labor only for heaven, to tend to a greater perfection than you have attained. We must always go ahead, and unfortunate is she, who stops when Our Lord invites her to advance. Whoever advances not in the way of perfection goes back. What merits would you not have acquired, if you had put to profit, and rendered yourself docile to all the inspirations of grace, which you have received in the years gone by? If you have not profited by those gifts, that time is lost for you. Do you know how long you are yet to live? No, for God alone has fixed the day and moment of your death, and He has not, and will not reveal it to you. The future is not yours to dispose of, and, perhaps, there is no future for you. Even were you certain of its being yours, it would avail you little, if it were to be spent as the past. Twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty years have flown from you. What are they now to you? There was a year, perhaps more than one, when you made a retreat. What does it now seem to you, but as a day, a point, that can scarcely be seen? In that year, in so many such years, how many moments were lost by you? Reflect seriously, and consider that the time still remaining to you, is flying rapidly, that moments have gone, even whilst meditating this truth, and that hours, days and years, will move with the same rapidity.

Second Point.

Consider, how Almighty God presses you to hasten, without stopping to regard the frivolous objects of the world; how He desires you to tend to your perfection, to your last end. For this reason St. Paul says: "Time is short, my brethren, time is short; there remains for you but one step more, and you will be at the end of your career." And for this same reason, St. Peter tells us that the demon is as a lion around us, seeking to devour us, because he knows that we have no time to lose.

We can lose time in religion as well as in the world, and, generally speaking, religious persons, unless they watch over themselves, are more exposed to this misfortune, than persons of the world, being more disengaged from temporal cares and affairs, which occupy worldly persons. "Ah," said a demon, one day, to one of these souls, by the mouth of a possessed person. "Ah, if I had one moment of the time which you lose, and a Mary to call on, I would no longer be a demon." Let us then, think seriously of this one affair, which alone deserves our care; it is the affair of time and the affair of eternity. There is question of avoiding an evil that will never end. There is question of obtaining a happiness that will never end. We must now acquire the means of purchasing a kingdom, which Jesus Christ tried to acquire for us in His thirty-three years of labor, and for which He paid all His blood. We have much to do to repair the past, and but little time, perhaps only this moment, in which we are meditating this awful truth. We are not certain that the rest of the day will be ours. O religious soul! hasten towards thy perfection; God awaits thee at the goal, to reward thee with eternal glory.

Alas, my God! how far am I from the term at which I ought to be, and where, perhaps, Thou art waiting for me to bestow on me some particular grace, and which I must lose, because I am not yet so far! Oh, had I kept pace with Thy graces, I should now be far on the road to that sanctity to which I am obliged by my holy state! I have deferred, from day to day, to begin a new life; but now indeed I do begin, not knowing how long I shall have

the privilege of promoting Thy glory, and procuring my salvation. To fail in my resolution will be to be unfaithful to grace. Even if I were assured of many years, they would not be too many to be employed in loving, serving, possessing Thee. The patriarch Joseph was not ignorant of the famine that was to follow the seven years of abundance. He began at once to prepare for it, not waiting until there was need to make provision. So will I, dear Lord, begin in time to prepare for eternity, laying up all the merits I can, until the time arrives when I can do nothing, when the night will overshadow me, and my only dependence will be what I have sent before me. Oh, from this moment, my God, I will begin to put my hand to the good work, I will abandon myself entirely into the bosom of my Father, I will say with childlike confidence: "My Father, I am all Thine, incapable of anything, save what Thou wilt enable me to accomplish! I give myself to Thee without reserve! No more delays on my part, no more hesitation, no more indolence, but relying solely on Thy love and powerful assistance, I will ever make rapid advancement towards my last end, my sovereign happiness, my God!

MEDITATION.

ON THE PRICE OF GRACE.

First Point.

"AND we helping do exhort you, that you receive not the grace of God in vain."—II., Cor., vi., 1.

Grace emanates from the Divinity as the rays emanate from the sun. It is a portion of the divine light which enlightens our mind, and of divine love which inflames our heart. Our divine Saviour has acquired this precious gift for us, by shedding all His Blood for us, and by all the sufferings He endured from His birth to His death upon the Cross. To know the value of grace, we must under-

stand what it cost its Author. For this, we will place in the scales of justice on one side His humiliations and annihilations, His cross with all its heaviness, His dolors with all their extent, and His love with all its ardors; on the other side, we will place the wonderful effects of this gift of grace in our souls, the pious affections it excites in the heart, the victories it makes us gain over ourselves, the world and the demon. Then, comparing with the source, the many streams that flow to us from it, we will exclaim with love and gratitude: "O what a happiness for me to be admitted to these living waters, which will refresh me in this vale of tears!" It is certainly true, that all the grace we receive was purchased by the crib and cross of Jesus Christ. O religious soul! Can you recall the history of your life, without recalling the numberless graces you have received from your God? Where is the day, where is the hour, the moment, the instant of your life, in which you cannot find the remembrance of some new benefit, some wonderful effect of grace?—In your infancy, what instructions! In your youth, what salutary admonitions! What good desires! What holy sentiments! And later, what holy attractions! What an extraordinary grace in the choice of a more holy, a more perfect state! Since then, what a multitude of graces, sacraments, good examples, prayers, meditations, and inspirations! Count, if you can, the graces of one single day, of one hour, and you will be forced to say with the royal Prophet: "What shall I render to the Lord for His multiplied gifts?" Ah, Lord! you require of me to preserve with care, the remembrance of Thy benefits! Is it not an obligation that love and gratitude imposes upon me, and to which I must be inviolably faithful? Give me, then, the new grace of perseverance in my present resolution of serving Thee more faithfully!

Second Point.

Consider that grace being intended for you, and the richest treasure that God can give, you should often beg it with earnestness, receive it with gratitude, preserve it with the greatest care, and make it fructify to your advantage. Let us see, in the first place, if you fulfil all that grace

requires of you. With grace you can do all things, but without it you can do nothing for your salvation. Prayer is an effect of grace, you should, then, often beg of the God of mercy to grant you a love for prayer, saying with the Apostle: "Lord, teach me how to pray." You are the poor one whom He finds in indigence, the sick one who has but wounds to present to Him, the blind one who has need of some one to guide his steps, a weak reed that is agitated by the least wind. Now, it is grace alone, that makes you know your necessities, and leads you to feel the weight of your miseries. It is grace that dissipates all your darkness, that conducts you to God, and makes you say with a holy ardor: "O God, come to my aid; O Lord make haste to help me." Other times at the sight of the dangers around you, you can say to Him: "Lord, save me, or I perish." Almighty God is always ready to listen to your supplications, and gives you grace suited to every danger, necessity, and temptation, but you, on your side, must be faithful in corresponding to what He gives you. It is by a pure effect of His mercy that He enriches your soul with His grace, after having preferred you to so many others, who perish in the darkness of error. Bless, then, forever, His ineffable bounty, and say to Him: "Be Thou blessed by all nations."

Third Point.

In the designs of God, each grace that you receive, obliges you to a new progress in the way of virtue. It is a talent which He confides to you. To lose or to bury it, is an infidelity. Grace, is that grain of mustard-seed, which always continues its growth, until it reaches unto heaven, and produces by your correspondence a degree of glory to God for all eternity, and a degree of love for yourself which will have no end. Yes, for having been faithful to a little grace, you will love God to more advantage for all eternity; whereas, by neglecting a little grace, you will lose this degree, and be, as it were, an ungrateful one, unworthy of new graces. Every grace lost is as a drop of the precious blood of Jesus Christ, which you let fall to the ground through pure negligence. Grace,

takes every day a thousand new forms, to penetrate into your heart. Sometimes, it is a tender voice that calls you. Do you listen to it with a docile ear? Sometimes, it is an attraction that invites you, solicits you. Are you faithful to follow it? At other times, it is a reproach, a secret warning. Does it awaken your tepidity? Grace, not only visits you by holy words, it also presents itself to you in the various exercises and duties of the day and of your state? At the holy table, it presents itself to you as a furnace of love. Does it inflame you with holy desire? Do you draw new strength from this celestial bread, which nourishes you so often? Admitted so frequently to the Sacrament of penance, do you not contract more stains by approaching, than you would by abstaining altogether? In your meditations, prayers, holy office, do you profit by those tender sentiments of piety, that grace presents to you? What are the effects of those holy aspirations that grace suggests to you? Do they elevate your soul more to God, and unite you to Him by new ties of holy love? are the holy resolutions that grace inspires you to make, as so many new links of the chain that attaches you to Him, and are they put into practice? Your soul is that cherished tree, planted in the vineyard of the Lord, watered by the Blood of a God made man, cultivated by His hand, and refreshed by His holy love. Does it produce that hundred-fold of delicious fruit? Ah, repent for your past abuse of grace, and resolve to profit by the future.

MEDITATION.

ON ETERNITY.

First Point.

THE eternity of God is not a succession of time; each moment, each instant, it is entire. The millions of years that are already past, take nothing from it, and the millions of ages that are yet to come, will not diminish it. Eternity is an eternal moment, without beginning, without

end, without succession, without diminution. It is a moment, because at each instant it is entire ; it is an eternal moment, because this moment lasts forever. Let us call to mind, if possible, ages passing million after million, and we will see that God existed before their commencement, enjoying in Himself all his benefits, all His divine qualities, anterior to all ages, posterior to all, and that the whole eternity is but a point, and less than an instant to Him. This God of goodness in creating us made us, as it were, partakers of this eternity. Our bodies will die, but our souls are immortal and will live forever. We should not then attach ourselves to the sweetnesses of this life, nor be cast down by its afflictions. We should only look to the pleasures and pains of eternity ; these alone should be our desires and our fears. Perhaps we are all ready at the gate of this eternity, and soon we may enter therein. And even should our lives be prolonged for a number of years, what would they be compared to eternity ? What is the longest life, but a mere atom, a nothing, as it were ? We advance towards its end every instant, and, may be, the last step will be in the next instant. If so, what would we not wish to have done ? In what dispositions, are we for receiving the degree that will fix our lot for eternity ? Let us think well upon it, and do now what we would then wish to have done.

Second Point.

O eternity of happiness ! Sweet sojourn of the elect ! How many benefits hast thou prepared for us, which we do not seem to desire ! We attach ourselves to vain shadows which always elude our grasp, to perishable goods which will soon disappear and quit us forever. O where is our reason !

O unhappy eternity ! Fatal abyss into which so many sinners are plunged, with what torments dost Thou not threaten us, with what frightful pains ! Alas ! how little do we think of it, how little do we reflect upon it, while, on the contrary, we fear so much the pains of this life, which last but a few instants ! O where is our faith ? Mortal as we are, always dying in this world, and destined to live forever in the next, how can we occupy

ourselves with any other thing than the delights of a happy eternity, or the horrors of a miserable one? In a little while, our course must be finished, and when the final hour strikes what will we think of past troubles, trials, pleasures, and so many little nothings that now absorb our thoughts? At this very moment, many are falling into eternity, their sentence is now being pronounced, and what do they think of the past? O think well, religious soul, of this awful truth of eternity, and, in its light, view the nothingness of this world. The thought of eternity will cause you to overcome your pride, it will animate you to vanquish your evil inclinations, to stifle your resentments, soften your pains, and make them supportable. It will animate your generosity for all sacrifices, enlighten you in doubts, strengthen you in your combats. It will be the soul of your actions, and the will of your conduct; in fine, the thought of eternity will suffice to make you a saint, a perfect and holy religious.

Third Point.

Everything earthly passes away with time, days, years, events, ages, seasons. Yes, kings, subjects, thrones, crowns, dignities, honors, and all created things, are so many waves of the sea, that are carried with impetuosity one after another, until they are swallowed up and lost to the human eye. O souls, formed to the image and likeness of God! Why will you attach yourselves to the things of this world, when you are made for eternity? If you desire glory, seek that which is solid; if you are avaricious, seek permanent riches. If you are fond of pleasures, seek the pure and lasting delights of heaven.

It is certainly a great folly to run the risk of losing immortal riches, by seeking for those of time, which you can enjoy but a little while! Let us generously renounce everything which does not tend to eternity; let us leave to this world what belongs to it and give ourselves to heaven. Let us henceforth speak of nothing but eternity, think of nothing else, have nothing else in view in our daily actions but eternity; let us make it the soul of our occupations and duties, the rule of our conduct, the motive

of our fears and hopes, the constant study of our whole lives, so that when our earthly career will be finished, an eternity of glory and happiness will open to receive us into its bosom. O Eternity! Eternity! Eternity! What will be my eternity?

MEDITATION.

ON CHRIST INSTITUTING THE EUCHARIST.—THE SACRAMENT OF HIS LOVE.

First Point.

“He riseth from Supper and layeth aside His garments; and having taken a towel, He girded himself. After that, He poureth water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples, and to wipe them with the towel, wherewith he was girded.—John xiii., 4 5.

Let us here consider the actions; Jesus, the sovereign Master of heaven and earth prostrates before His Disciples and Apostles, and washes their feet! What is more calculated to confound our pride?—He stoops to kiss the feet of each one after washing them. He does not even except the treacherous Judas! Jesus at the feet of Judas! . . . He, Who is the Creator of the whole universe abases Himself before His creature! And what a creature! One that is about to betray Him! Oh wonder of heaven and earth! Jesus kneeling at the feet of Judas! Jesus humbles Himself to the dust, and we fear to humble ourselves to a companion, a sister whom we may have offended, to one who bears the image and likeness of God. We fear to humble ourselves before a creature, who is cherished by God; before an angel of earth, perhaps, who is the chosen spouse of God! Still more, we fear to humble ourselves before a superior, who holds the place and authority of God.

Religious souls, behold your God! Have you endured humiliations like unto His!—Jesus, places Himself at table. Before instituting the great and adorable mystery, He holds a secret interview with His Heavenly Father, and prays for all those, who were in future to

partake of the heavenly food. In this moment, you were present to His mind and His Heart, as if you alone were, or would be, in the world. See, how He loved you, and loves you still, every time He comes to you in Holy Communion. "Take and eat," said He, "for this is My Body, which will be delivered for you." O powerful words! "Take and eat." But it is not bread which Jesus holds in His hands; it is His adorable Body, all entire, as God and as Man. What love is there like unto His?—Will you refuse to give Him your love in return? your whole heart?

Second Point.

"I have desired to eat this Pasch with you," said our divine Saviour. Consider, Who it is that addresses these words to us. It is Jesus, our Saviour, our Spouse, our God, Who has descended from heaven to repair our losses, and procure us eternal happiness. He pronounces these consoling words, at a moment when He is about to leave this world, which He would not quit without giving us a new proof of his fatherly love. They express that excess of love, which filled His Heart, and which He had felt from the first instant of His Incarnation, and which now assumes the form of violence. But to whom does he address these words? to the Apostles only?—No, He embraced then, in His divine charity, all the faithful, who would afterwards participate in the Holy Eucharist with proper dispositions. He had each one of us, particularly in view, and saw the number of Communions each of us would make, and our dispositions and preparation. Every time we approach the Holy Table, He says to us from the depths of His loving Heart: "With desire I have desired to eat this Pasch with you." Should not these touching words awaken all the sentiments of your heart, and inspire you with a desire to correspond to the love which Jesus deigns to testify for you? His Heart was made for your redemption; yours was made for Him, and He alone should be your joy, your repose, your light, your strength. Why, then, are you so often cold and insensible to Him? It is, because you know not how sweet He is, or because you do not purify your heart from earthly affections, so con-

trary to His love. It is, because you do not mortify your natural inclinations, your passions and love of created things. It is necessary to sacrifice everything that puts the least obstacle to the operations of grace, otherwise, our hearts will not hear the voice of Jesus, they will not be dilated with His presence, and we will not hear from Him these consoling words: "My beloved is all to me, and I am all to her," which we will surely hear, if we are faithful to His holy love.

Third Point.

Jesus, having loved His own that were in the world, loved them to the end. God is charity, and His love is manifested in His works. But of all the gifts He has been pleased to bestow upon man, the greatest, the sweetest, the most precious, and the most capable of securing us happiness, is the gift He has made of Himself in the adorable Eucharist.

Let us consider the moment and the time in which He instituted this Sacrament of His love. It was when He was near the last sacrifice of His precious life. And under what circumstances? It was when His own people were about to make Him undergo the most unworthy treatment; when they were plotting to take away His life. One of the Apostles was about to betray Him; another would soon deny Him, all would abandon Him. It was when He foresaw all the future sacrileges, abominations, and profanations, that would be committed against His sacred person, hidden under the Eucharistic veils. It was when He foresaw the desolation and solitude in which He would be left in so many temples; it was when He foresaw the rage, fury, and blasphemies of so many heretics; the contempt, coldness, and indifference of such a multitude of hearts that would neither love nor recognize Him. Yes, He saw all, counted all, knew all, felt all, at that last sad moment among His own. O how strong must have been that love which so much ingratitude was not capable of weakening! Our salvation demanded the sacrifice of His life; but his heart, so loving, would not permit Him to leave us orphans, and He invented this means of perpetuating His presence

among his children. He remained and still remains amongst us without majesty, without pomp or grandeur, but buried in a profound obscurity. Yes, it was truly a mystery of love that He instituted, for He knew that if His glory should be manifested, weak and timid souls would fear to approach Him, and His loving Heart desired to be communicated to all.

O infinite goodness! O love without measure! How is it that my heart has not been, heretofore, as loving, as generous, as devoted to Jesus, as His is to me? O my divine Saviour, give me the grace always to approach Thee with a well prepared heart, so that all my past defects will be repaired, my soul strengthened in virtue, and my entire life be conformable to Thine!

MEDITATION.

ON THE OBLATION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

First Point.

CONSIDER that the principal and most worthy of all the oblations ever made to God was the oblation that Jesus Christ, true Son of God, made of Himself to His heavenly Father. This oblation, which began at the first moment of His conception, was continued during His whole life, until it was perfected and consummated upon the altar of the Cross.

First, this divine Saviour, offered Himself to God His Father, as a holocaust, to honor and glorify Him, and to supply whatever is wanting to the adorations, homages, and other religious duties rendered Him by men and angels. For, all the honor and glory they can render to God in Heaven and on earth is always infinitely less than is due to the infinite greatness of His sovereign Majesty. To the Son alone it belongs to honor and glorify the Father, as He deserves to be honored and glorified.

If, then, O religious soul, you desire that the oblation you have made of yourself should be a meritorious holocaust,

by which you may worthily honor and glorify God, unite in spirit with Jesus Christ, enter into all this divine Saviour's sentiments of respect and love for His Father, and renew the offering and sacrifice of yourself to this heavenly Father, through the merits of His Son, as a holocaust destined solely for His honor and glory.

But remember that the victim offered in holocaust ought to be wholly consumed in the sacrificial fire ; nor is it permitted to reserve anything whatever ; and, consequently, in order to render your oblation perfect, you must immolate it entirely to God in the flames of pure love.

Oh ! what a blessing for you, if, on coming out of retreat, you can truly say with the apostle : " I live, now not I ; but Christ liveth in me." (Gal. ii., 20).

Consider further, that Our Lord offered Himself not only as a holocaust to honor God His Father, but also as a Victim of propitiation for our sins. As St. John says, " He is the propitiation for our sins : and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." (I. John ii., 2.)

Yes, this divine Saviour was the Lamb of God, Who, by His death, took away the sins of the world ; He offered Himself to the divine justice, as that Victim of the old Law, that was charged with the sins of the people. " Who His own self," as says the Prince of the Apostles, " bore our sins in His Body," upon the Cross, as upon an altar, " to expiate them by His Blood and His death," that " we being dead to sins, should live to justice." (I. Pet. ii., 24).

If, then, O religious soul, you wish to be perfectly conformable to your amiable Saviour, you must make your oblation not only a holocaust, but also a sacrifice of expiation ; that is, reflecting upon all that you have ever done to displease God, and conceiving perfect sorrow for it, you should renew the holy and religious oblation you have made of yourself, with the particular intention to repair the offences you have committed against the majesty of God and to satisfy His justice. But this intention must extend to the remaining years of your life, and all that you will henceforth do in the religious state must be, as it were, a continuation of this sacrifice of expiation. You must consider yourself only as a victim, to be immo-

lated every day and consumed in the flames of loving sorrow, or dolorous love, and that death alone will put an end to this sacrifice.

Yes, even though you should have the same assurance of the remission of your sins which St. Magdalen had, if there is in your heart a spark of the true love of God, with it, you must enkindle every day the fire of sacrifice; and never should you think that you have sufficiently expiated the offences committed against a goodness that you can never sufficiently love.

Second Point.

Consider that the oblation of Jesus Christ, containing in itself by excellence the perfection of all the ancient sacrifices, was not only a holocaust and a sacrifice of propitiation, but also a peace-offering of thanksgiving and imprecation.

Yes, this divine Saviour offered Himself upon the cross, and still offers Himself daily upon our altars to His heavenly Father, as a peace-offering, as a worthy thanksgiving for all the graces and mercies that God unceasingly bestows upon men, and to obtain new favors for them.

Alas! what would become of us, if this kind and loving Saviour did not continually present Himself before the Face of His Father, as the holy Apostle says, to repair our offences and ingratitude, and to obtain the grant of our petitions, which would be rejected, rather than received and favorably heard, if we had not such an Advocate, before the throne of the divine Majesty.

Reflect seriously upon this truth, and acknowledge the need you have of this divine Mediator, in order to render acceptable to God the renewal of your oblation, which you are about to make. Having united yourself to Him with lively faith, perfect confidence, and ardent love, prepare to offer yourself once more to God as a peace-offering, and to make this sacrifice and oblation of yourself in thanksgiving for the countless favors and blessings, that it has pleased His infinite goodness to bestow upon you, and, disposing your soul for their reception, beg Him to grant you the continuation and increase of His graces, and, especially,

that of inviolable fidelity and loving perseverance in the blessing of your vocation.

Consider, and be attentive to the words that the holy Apostle employs to make you understand and realize the excess of love that Jesus Christ evinced in offering and sacrificing Himself for you. He says: "The charity of Christ presseth us." (II Cor. v., 14.) Alas! is there anything capable of pressing our hearts with sweeter violence, than to see ourselves prevented by the love of a God! O Lord, "what is man, that Thou art mindful of him!" (Ps. viii., 5).

But how is it, that this divine charity presseth us? It is, says the Apostle, when "judging this," considering, reflecting with attention upon this truth, "that if one died for all, then all were dead." (II. Cor. v., 14.) Yes, we were all dead by the death of sin, and we could never of ourselves come forth from this state of death, so that, to draw us from it and restore us to life, it was necessary, as says the same Apostle, "that Jesus Christ should die for all." And, consequently, it was necessary that Jesus Christ should die for you in particular, and that He should bear you in special remembrance upon the altar of the Cross. If you did not acknowledge this truth and say, with the same Apostle, "Who loved me and delivered Himself for me," (Gal. ii., 20.) you would be faithless and ungrateful.

But what follows from this, if not, as the Apostle, concludes "that they also, who live, may not now live to themselves, but unto Him who died for them."

Say, then, in your heart: O my Jesus, my Saviour, Thou didst die to give me life: then, my life is no longer mine, but wholly Thine; I owe it to Thee, and I give it to Thee, and, in order to do so, I offer and sacrifice it to the manner of life, that is most pleasing to Thee and most according to my condition and capacity.

I wish, then, no longer to live to myself, but to Thee; and I make this choice, in order the better to live to Thee and the less to myself.

This is, indeed, the reason that I give myself with my whole heart to Him, Who has so generously and lovingly delivered Himself for me,

MEDITATION.

ON THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS.

First Point.

THE heart of Jesus *promised* humility to the Order of the Visitation.

“If the sisters of this congregation are very humble and faithful to God, they will have the Heart of Jesus, their crucified Spouse, as their place of retreat and repose in this world, and His heavenly palace for their abode in eternal life.”

Our holy founder, during his mortal life, made his abode in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in which his repose was never interrupted by the most distracting occupations. Moses, by conversing familiarly with God, became the meekest of men, and our Blessed Father, by his intimate union with the divine Heart of Jesus, acquired the perfection of the two virtues of this adorable Heart, *humility and meekness*.

Later, our great saint established the Order of the Visitation to render, by the practice of meekness and humility, continual homage to the adorable Heart of Jesus in His hidden and annihilated life. These two virtues are the basis and foundation of our Institute, and entitle us to the incomparable privilege of bearing the appellation of *Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*.

On the 10th of June, 1611, our holy founder wrote to our holy mother: “God gave me, last night, the thought that our house of the Visitation is, by His grace, noble and important enough to possess its coat-of-arms, its escutcheon, its motto and its legend. I think, then, dear mother, that we shall take for our coat-of-arms a heart pierced with two arrows, encircled by a crown of thorns, and surmounted by a cross, the lower end of which shall be in the cavity of this poor heart and be graven with the sacred names of Jesus and Mary.”

And what was this 10th of June, 1611? It was the

Friday after the octave of the Blessed Sacrament; that is, the very day chosen from all eternity to be consecrated to the Sacred Heart, the day on which our Lord said, sixty years later, to Blessed Margaret Mary: "I desire that the Friday after the octave of the Blessed Sacrament shall be throughout the Church a solemn feast, in honor of My divine Heart."

It was, then, on this self-same day that our holy founder gave to our rising Institute, for device and standard, a *heart crowned with thorns!*

"My daughter," continues our holy founder, in his letter of June 10, 1611, "when next we meet, I shall tell you, on this subject, a thousand little thoughts that have occurred to me, for truly, our little congregation is the work of Jesus and Mary. The Saviour, when dying, generated us *by the opening of His Sacred Heart.*"

Behold the Visitation at its birth, our venerated Institute in its cradle. . . . Behold how St. Francis of Sales sees his daughters, in the distant future, all lodged in the Heart of Jesus or rather, all the hearts of his cherished daughters around this Sacred Heart, doing Him homage as the sovereign King of hearts! He sees them . . . *daughters, adorers and servants of the loving Heart of our divine Saviour* . . . faithful imitators of His meekness and humility. Henceforth, our holy mother, St. Chantal, practised the virtue of humility, as if she had vowed it. Moreover, we find in the lives of our first mothers and sisters many touching examples, which fill with heavenly perfume the twelve volumes of the "Holy Year." Humility, practised with such constancy by millions of souls, passing into a holy habit, and becoming the spirit of the whole Order, was powerful enough to penetrate the heavens, ravish the adorable Heart of Jesus, and lodge Him in the humble garden of the Visitation, thence to inundate the world with very special graces. . .

Second Point.

The Heart of Jesus *given* to the humility of the Order of the Visitation, in the person of Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque.

The prepared canvas was ready the heart and soul of our blessed sister had expanded under the rays of grace and been formed to the practices of the religious life. The three grand revelations of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus were to re-animate the world, frozen by religious indifference, and to re-kindle the sacred fire, which was alas! almost extinguished. What privileged soul burning with love, will God choose to correspond to His designs? Our Blessed Sister Margaret Mary, the humblest, firmest, most self-abased and unwavering of souls! a soul invincible in patience, ardent in love, insatiable in the strength of sacrifice and devotedness . . . and, especially, a soul of a loftiness, delicacy and depth of feeling, capable of understanding the Heart of the divine Master and executing His purposes.

The first revelation, concerning devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, took place on the feast of St. John the Evangelist, the very day, on which, three hundred and fifty-three years before, St. Gertrude had learned, in a vision, that, if the well-beloved Disciple has said nothing of the sacred pulsations of the adorable Heart of Jesus, it was because God reserved to Himself to speak of them at a time, when the world would begin to grow cold. In this first revelation, Jesus made Blessed Margaret Mary rest for a long time on His divine breast. His adorable Heart was represented to her, as upon a throne of fire and flames darting out rays on all sides. It was more brilliant than the sun, and transparent as crystal. The Wound visibly appeared; encircling this divine Heart was a crown of thorns and, surmounting it, a cross. Jesus gave her to understand that these instruments of His Passion signified His immense love for men, which led Him to accept all the sufferings of His holy Humanity, and the outrages offered Him in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar until the consummation of ages. He made known to her His passionate desire to be loved by men, and the design He had formed of manifesting to them His Heart, to enrich them with its precious treasures of love, grace, mercy, sanctification and salvation. Jesus *assured* our blessed Sister that He takes singular pleasure in being honored under the figure of this

Heart of flesh. He *wishes* that its image should be publicly exposed, *promises* that wherever it is particularly honored it will draw down all sorts of blessings, and adds: "*I have chosen thee*, from an abyss of unworthiness and ignorance, to accomplish so great a design, so that all may be done by Me."

Religious Soul, who art making this meditation, thou it is whom Jesus addresses, as formerly He did thy Blessed Sister: "From all eternity, I have had designs of love over thee. . . . *I have chosen thee*. . . . *I have chosen thee*, by drawing thee out of the nothingness in which thou wast plunged, and creating thee in time. . . . *I have chosen thee*, by washing thee in the waters of Baptism, preferring thee to millions of souls, whom I have left in ignorance of the true God. . . . *I have chosen thee* from among those who strayed in the tortuous paths of schism and error. . . . *I have chosen thee* and crowned My graces, by bestowing on thee the inestimable gift of a religious vocation, separating thee from the multitude to make thee My spouse. . . . "*I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore have I drawn thee*."—(Jeremias xxxi., 3).

In the second revelation, Jesus Christ appeared to our Blessed Sister, brilliant with glory; His five Wounds shining like five suns. Flames darted forth from all parts of His sacred Humanity, but especially from His adorable Breast, which resembled a furnace. Jesus unveiled His Heart, the living Source of these flames. . . . He unfolded the inexplicable wonders of His pure love. . . . He complained of the ingratitude of men and added, at the close of this apparition; "Do you, at least, console and rejoice Me by supplying as much as you can for their ingratitude." For this purpose, He asked of her two things:

1st. To communicate on the first Friday of each month, in order to make reparation to Him.

2nd. To rise between eleven o'clock and midnight of the night between Thursday and Friday every week, and to prostrate for an hour, with her face to the ground, in expiation of the sins of men, and to console His Heart for that general desertion, to which the weakness of the Apostles in the Garden of Olives had been only a slight prelude.

Our Lord, thus addressing our Blessed Sister, addresses all Religious of the Visitation. . . He addresses you and me: "*Do you, at least, give Me this pleasure.*" . . Hence, our lives, our whole lives, should be those of reparation for the crimes of the world. . . what consolation, then, has our lives given to the Heart of Jesus? . . .

In the third revelation, our Blessed Sister received extraordinary graces. Our Lord appeared upon the altar and manifested to her His Heart: "Behold," He said to her! "this Heart which has so loved men!" He complains of their ingratitude, irreverence, sacrileges, coldness and contempt for Him in this Sacrament of Love. What is most painful to Jesus is that they that so treat Him are hearts consecrated to Him. Our Lord asks blessed Margaret Mary that the first Friday after the octave of the Blessed Sacrament be dedicated as a special feast in honor of His Sacred Heart, by communicating on that day, and making reparation for the indignities He receives. He promises that His Heart shall expand to pour out abundantly the influences of His Divine love on all that will render Him this honor, or procure its being rendered to Him.

In this revelation, our Lord invites all the houses of the Institute, all the Religious of the Visitation, to render especial worship to His Divine Heart. . . "He showed me," says our Blessed Sister later, in relating another vision, "the devotion to His Sacred Heart as a beautiful tree, destined from all eternity, to spring up and take root in the midst of our Institute, and to extend its branches into the houses that compose it, so that each may gather from it fruits most pleasing to her taste and liking, although not all in equal measure, for this will be proportioned to the labor, as the profit will be to the good dispositions of those who feed upon them. This divine Heart desires also that the Daughters of the Visitation should abundantly distribute to all that will eat of them the fruits of this sacred tree, without fearing that they will fail." Happy, but astonished at this mission, perhaps we will say, like our humble Sister Margaret Mary: "Lord how can I?" Separated from the world by our blessed enclosure, hidden behind our grates, in our humble and

obsure life. . . O Jesus, how can I? Let us be humble and hidden souls, souls of prayer, souls of "heavenly colloquies," but, particularly, souls enamored of love divine, souls of sacrifice. . . and we will have a power, a sway, over the Heart of Jesus, to which He can refuse nothing, and He, Himself, will do all for us.

MEDITATION.

UPON OUR LORD IN THE SEPULCHRE.

First Point.

OUR Lord in His tomb offers us an image of a most perfect life by His extreme solitude, His absolute dependence on the will of others, and His inseparable union with the Divinity. Let us follow in spirit the body of this adorable Saviour to the place of its burial, let us enter therein, and be with Him all alone for a little while. What shall we there see but obscurity, silence, a frightful quiet? Oh! what a profound repose, what unalterable recollection, what an active and passive forgetfulness! He uses not His senses, He is blind, deaf and dumb, and nothing shows He was ever of this world! True image, indeed, of what a good Christian should be, still more, of what a good religious should be. He there shows what those persons should be, who, withdraw from the world to consecrate themselves to God, in order to fulfil the better the promises made at their baptism. It is to express this sentiment of death to the world, that at the profession of a religious, we have some of the ceremonies and prayers used at burials; that they prostrate under a funeral pall, there to remain hidden for some time. It is for this, that we chant over them the *De Profundis* and other psalms that the Church uses when bearing her children to the grave. According to the civil law, from this day the professed religious no longer belongs to society; she is dead, and her life is hidden with Jesus Christ in God. Was it not in a kind of sepulchre that St. Paul,

the first hermit buried himself for the space of ninety years, after he had quitted all things in this world? He did not even know that men still existed in the world, for he asked: Do they still build cities? Do they still have wars? Are there many idolaters remaining? Behold the questions he put to St. Anthony three or four days before he died.

Second Point.

We should, from the moment of our profession, live unknown to the world, as we are no more of it. A religious soul, who would seek to appear before the world, should be regarded as a phantom, and the people of the world have just reason to say, when she concerns herself about earthly things: "What right has she to mix with us?" And, on the contrary, they are greatly edified, when they see or hear her complain of having her solitude interrupted by worldlings. Jesus Christ in his tomb is an image of the most perfect life, by His absolute dependence on the will of others. He has no will, no movement, He suffers Himself to be laid wherever others choose. He seems to say to his eternal Father: "When you will call Me, then will I answer." He leaves to men the care of his Body, indifferent as to whether it be covered with earth, or with flowers, with indignity or with honor. It makes no difference to Him whether they give Him a funeral service, or refuse it to Him. He cares for nothing that concerns this precious Body, the delight of the angels, who surround it in awful and silent adoration. Thus, religious soul, should you be immovable, indifferent to all that concerns your body, but supple and docile to the inspirations of God, attentive to the voice of superiors, as to the voice of Jesus Christ Himself, pliant and condescending to the inclinations of others and to the necessities of your neighbors, always ready, day or night, to quit your repose at the voice of obedience, or the call of charity. "My repose is not death, but a sweet sleep," said St. Irene from her tomb to the holy Bishop Spiridion, her Spiritual Father, who ordered her to declare what she had done with a certain deposit entrusted to her care. So should the truly religious soul exclaim at the voice of obedience, or the call of

charity; "Dispose of me as you like, for I am no longer my own," and we may add, that "she is dead, and her life is hidden with Jesus Christ in God."

Third Point.

Jesus Christ is an image of the most perfect life, by His intimate union with the Divinity. His Body, although separated from the soul, ceased not to be united with the Eternal Word. He was, therefore, living a superhuman life, although dead in appearance. In this, He should be our Model, for as St. Paul says, we are dead, but our life is hidden with our divine Redeemer. A religious soul is both living and dead, living the life of God, and dead to the world. Now, we can only attain to this supernatural life in God by death to our senses and to nature; therefore, there should be no reserve, everything should be sacrificed. We must remain continually in the presence of God, and perform every act with Him, through Him, and for Him. We must pray incessantly, and stand, as it were, between God and his creatures, to supplicate His mercy for them. Oh! who could regret leaving all for God, when there is so much offered here that is most sublime, far above all that this world could possibly bestow? A religious who leads a hidden and mortified life, will therein find such extraordinary sweetness, that she will be forced to cry out with St. Anthony, who finding the night so short said to the rising sun: "Why do you come to trouble my repose? to interrupt my communications with God?" Yes, it is granted to the hidden religious to say at the end of her mortal career, "I would never have believed it was so sweet to die." This world is without sweetness or consolation to a soul who has commenced her beatitude here below, and her natural death will be but as an effort of love, a passage from God to God, from one paradise to another. O my Jesus! hidden in Thy holy Sepulchre, give me the grace to lead a hidden and retired life, with my heart disengaged from all that is earthly, and fixed upon Thee alone, for Whom I was made, and with Whom I am to dwell eternally in the land of the blessed!

MEDITATION.

ON THE PROMISES MADE AT BAPTISM.

First Point.

CONSIDER what you were in the eyes of faith, at the moment of your birth. The unfortunate child of a father still more unfortunate, by whose disobedience you became guilty. This is a fundamental article of faith which you must admit and believe. In that sad state, heaven was closed for you ; you were the enemy of God and the slave of satan. But, our Lord Who, in the rigor of His justice, could have left you in the way of perdition, as He has left so many others, by a wonderful effect of His love, and a predilection which you did not merit, cast upon you a look of His mercy. By the ministry of His priest, He poured upon you a sacred water which purified you from every stain. From that happy moment, He established His throne in your heart, enriched it with His graces, and banished from it the spirit of darkness who held you captive. You were ornamented with the most august titles and delivered from a ship-wreck far more dangerous than that which threatened the child Moses. A Guardian Angel was appointed to protect and defend you ; you became the child of God, a member of Jesus Christ, and the temple of the Holy Ghost. The eternal Father adopted you for His own, acknowledged you as affiliated to His divine Son, and participating, as it were, of His Divine nature.

If worldlings pride themselves so highly on their noble extraction, what glory should you not boast of in being the child of God ? you, who from a vile nothing became a celestial and divine being ? This thought should often be present to you, and fill you with the most lively gratitude to so good, so merciful, so loving a Father. Without being rash or presumptuous you can exclaim : “ I am the child of God ! Heaven is my inheritance ! To attach myself to anything on earth is unworthy of my birth ; unworthy of my illustrious family, since I am descended from God Himself ! The worldly can satisfy their

passions, but for me, I aspire to eternal happiness ; a sentiment all divine fills my soul to elevate it to heaven." O religious Soul ! think of thy obligation as a christian only, and see what is required of thee. Thy religious vows are but new means of making thee observe more perfectly those contracted in Baptism. Thou canst not be unfaithful in one without infringing on the other.

Second Point.

You are the child of God, but have you not tarnished the lustre of so glorious a title by some infidelity ? Have you always been a submissive and grateful child ? God has never ceased to cherish and love you, but have you always thought of Him, loved Him, and served Him ? Have you always glorified His name ? Have you always corresponded to His benefits, by fidelity in acknowledging them and thanking His goodness for them ? Have you followed His holy Will in all things, both little and great ? Have you been docile and obedient to His orders ? Ah, the remembrance of all these benefits, of all these occasions when you could have proved your fidelity, perhaps will give rise to some bitter regrets. To you, who are privileged souls, destined by a special predilection to live in this holy sanctuary, we may speak, and ask if you have not added to the holy promises of Baptism the more sacred and solemn vows of religion ? Yes, and thereby multiplied your obligations a thousand-fold. You have offered yourself as a holocaust ; the victim is on the altar, you cannot withdraw it without a sacrilege. In the school of piety and perfection where you have placed yourself, everything should animate your fervor, every step should lead you to a higher degree of sanctity ; every word, act and thought should increase your merit, your eternal glory. But alas ! it often happens, that those who have chosen God for their Spouse provoke His vengeance by their wilful infidelities, and, instead of becoming more holy, fall back, and become less christian, perhaps, than they would have been in the world. God alone should be the object of the love of a religious, and the sacred fire of divine love the only flame which should burn in her heart. After

having broken all the bonds that attached her to earth, He should be her only treasure. By the sacrifice she has made of her will, she should be ready, at every moment, to receive the commands of those who guide her on the part of God. Everything in her should be for God, in God, and with God, for such is the indispensable obligation imposed on her by the promises of Baptism, strengthened and renewed by the vows of religion. Fidelity on her part is the only sure pledge of her eternal happiness. Reflect upon the past, the present, and the future, and let not so many means of perfection be lavished on you in vain ; a rigorous account awaits every wilful violation of your sacred engagements ; and a bright reward for their fulfilment is promised by Him to Whom alone you belong and for Whom you were created.

Third Point.

When you received holy Baptism, our Lord adopted you as one of His chosen members. From that moment, His Blood flowed in your veins, and one same principle of life animated you. Yes, said St. Jerome, when your sponsors presented you in the temple, to receive the holy sacrament of Baptism, when they pronounced for you the sacred promises that engaged you forever to God, the celestial spirits flocked around you, to receive you as their brother, and bear your sacred enrolment to heaven. The paper on which they wrote what they witnessed was the Book of Life ; the ink they used was the Blood of Jesus Christ ; the character that was imprinted on you was the seal of God. Now all these things were recorded not only in the register of Baptism, but placed also in the archives or eternity, where they will be kept, and when you appear before the judgment-seat of God, they will be presented to you as the most sacred law upon which your lot will be decided.

If Jesus Christ is your head, you should be animated with His Spirit and have no sentiments but such as He had. From the crib to the cross this divine Master said to you : “ Learn of Me, that I am meek and humble of heart.” Are you fully convinced of the truth that you

should be humble and meek? Do you never desire the first rank, the highest honors, the greatest distinctions? Do you ever really seek obscurity and silence? Do you desire to be passed by as nothing, forgotten, neglected, despised? Do not humiliation and censure cause your self-love to revolt? or, at least, do they not disquiet your heart? You have renounced the world with all its pomps, but do you not still fear to give some displeasure to worldlings? Do you really flee from its maxims, its intercourse, its spirit? Do you not seek its admiration, feel its sarcasms and try to keep with it? You have renounced the devil and all his works? Do you not listen to his suggestions when you neglect little things not of absolute obligation? Do you not give him pleasure by following your pride on occasions when you should humble yourself? You have renounced the flesh with all its temptations; do you mortify your senses, your appetites, your love of ease and so many other things that nature seeks for? Do you live for God alone? Have you a great fear of displeasing Him? A great desire to please Him?

Ah, religious soul! humble yourself profoundly under the powerful hand of God, at seeing yourself so far removed from your model, Jesus Christ. Deplore your faults, and renew with a new courage the promises of your Baptism and the sacred Vows you may since have added. Offer to your offended and irritated, but loving and forgiving God, a sincere resolution of being all His in the future, of being true to the least part of your engagements, and forever faithful in the observance of your sacred vows.

MEDITATION.

ON CONSIDERING OURSELVES PILGRIMS IN IMITATION OF
OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

First Point.

EVERY Christian soul, and especially a religious, should consider herself as a pilgrim on earth, and, after the example of our Lord, use all things as if they were not. A traveller uses all that he meets with as belonging to another and not to himself; he attaches himself neither to house, nor conveniences of any kind; he knows that to-day or to-morrow he must leave them to seek others further on. Thus, the christian and religious soul lives disengaged from all things, and attaches herself to nothing because this is not the place of her abode. A pilgrim travels with diligence, especially when the days are short and bad. "My brethren," says St. Paul, "let us advance rapidly towards perfection, for time is short and death approaches." Is it thus that you act? Are you detached from all, the world, creatures, conveniences? Do you advance in the way of perfection? Do you hasten? Do you run, as it were? Our Lord never delayed, and for this reason, He says to you: "If any one wishes to come after Me, let him take up his cross daily and follow Me."

But, religious soul, it is not sufficient for you to be a pilgrim on earth, you must be still more crucified, as was your divine Model, for St. Paul has declared that whoever follows Jesus Christ must crucify his flesh with all its vices and bad inclinations. And St. Bernard says, that to be crucified is to esteem as delights what the world considers crosses, and crosses, what the world considers delights. To be crucified say the Holy Fathers is to be so strongly attached to the Will of God, by the nails of faith, hope and love, that nothing can ever separate us from it. An ordinary pilgrim can travel as he pleases, can advance or return as it suits him; but a crucified soul is deprived of the use and liberty of his faculties and members, and to

every temptation can say: "How can I do this or that, when I am crucified? How can I offend my God, Who is so merciful to me? It is in vain that you tempt me, I am crucified, and have no longer the liberty of sinning. Therefore, depart from me!

Second Point.

This degree of perfection is good, but it does not suffice. She, who is fastened to the cross with Jesus, can still see all around her, can hear what is passing, and make some use of her other senses. But the religious, who desires to be perfect, must also die with our Lord; that is, she must be entirely dead to the life of the senses, and to all natural satisfactions. A body without life no longer sees, feels, hears, fears or desires; we may ill treat it with blows and injurious words, and it will give no sign of offence, or resentment. So should the religious be, perfectly dead to all the sensibilities of nature and self-love; or, at least, she should repress, restrain, and stifle them so effectually, that none may perceive she has them. But, it is not sufficient for her to be dead to all the feelings of nature; she must also be buried; that is, she must be reduced to ashes, consumed and annihilated, if we may so speak, if she would wish to be perfect. A body without life is perfectly indifferent to all that concerns it; we may render it honor or not, may bury it with pomp, or cast it upon a dung-hill, and it has nothing to say; once interred, all is finished for it; we remove from it, forget it, and would wish never more to see it. Thus, a religious soul, who tends sincerely towards perfection, should be buried with our Lord according to these words of the Apostle: "your life is hidden with Jesus Christ in God." Henceforth, you should be unknown to the world, despised, forgotten, and abandoned by it. It is a necessity, the consequence and punishment of sin; therefore, a truly religious soul should be without glory, without satisfactions, without pleasures, and without a natural life; considering herself before God and men as nothing, until she will be resuscitated in God, Who will then charge Himself with her glory.

Third Point.

The highest degree of christian and religious perfection is to descend with our Lord Jesus Christ from the tomb into Limbo, by despoiling ourselves of all consolation, both spiritual and temporal; remaining in darkness, in the sensible privation of God, and in an exile of the heart, under the power of the demon himself, if God permits it, without trouble, diffidence or murmur, until our divine Saviour comes to draw us from the abyss, to make us arise and lead a still more spiritual and supernatural life. We must follow Jesus, step by step, until we arrive with Him at the glorious goal which He has promised us, not stopping on our way, but hurrying to repair lost time, and keeping before us, the object of our life, our consecration, our continual immolation and sacrifice. Let us see what our progress has been, and at what point we now are. Are we disengaged from all things as pilgrims upon earth? Do we really condemn the world, its vain customs, maxims, and opinions? Have we any desire for the goods of the world, its conveniences and the like? Are we as indifferent to good and bad treatment as a body without life? Are we not sensitive still to marks of disesteem, dishonor, and contempt? Do we not feel it when we are slighted, or forgotten? when no affection is shown us by our relations, friends, sisters, and others? Do we sincerely desire to be hidden from all worldly view? Are we as willing to be in hell with God, as in Paradise without Him? Are we contented and satisfied to live, deprived of all His gifts, of all His consolations, as well as in the privation of all created goods? O sacred annihilation, wherein the soul loses her own being to possess that of God; wherein she returns to her original nothingness! O living sepulchres, where the wise ones of this world build a heavenly solitude! O christian and religious Soul! renounce all creatures, and especially yourself, that you may live for God alone, who will be to you a Paradise of delights in this world, and your everlasting glory in heaven. *God alone in all things, and all things in God alone!*

MEDITATION.

ON AVOIDING ALL RELAPSES INTO OUR FORMER
FAULTS.*First Point.*

THE religious soul, to animate herself and to avoid the dreadful misfortune of a relapse, should diligently apply herself to discover the illusions and errors into which she has hitherto fallen. Seeking the causes of her past relaxations, she should take the means of no more falling into them. How have you hitherto gone astray? What has been the source of your relaxations in the spiritual life? Have you remembered the grace of your vocation and the sanctity of your obligations to support yourself in the austere life of your profession? As the servant, the beloved, the spouse of Jesus Christ, have you always borne in mind your titles and your duties? The fidelity which a servant owes her master, a friend her friend, a spouse her spouse, should have been yours. The faithful servant always acts as if she were under the eye of her master, counting as a theft, every moment of her life, that is not employed in the service of him to whom she owes everything. Thus, should a religious soul walk always in the presence of her divine Master, Who has His eyes constantly fixed upon her.

The faithful friend is always thinking of her friend, and is never wearied with serving her, even in the least things. Thus should the religious observe, with unremitting fervor, the least obligations of her state, as well as its essential duties. The faithful spouse has no heart but for her Spouse. and her mind is occupied only with him, whether He be present or absent. Thus should the religious, dead to the world, and buried in the cloister with her divine Spouse, banish from her mind and heart every care, but that of pleasing Him. Too much attention to exterior objects is often the cause of a quick relapse. Alas! how fatal to many is that close connection that exists between the heart and the senses! How often, as

the prophet Jeremiah says, does the eye destroy the soul ! It was by going out of your heart that you fell into relaxation ; it will be, therefore, by incessantly re-entering it, that you will prevent new infidelities.

A religious should live, as if there were none but God and herself in the world. The solitude of the heart should be to her what the mystical ark, which floated upon the waters of the deluge, was to the dove. When her mind escapes and returns to the world, she should look upon it as out of its centre and element, and take no rest until she has recalled it. Has not the idea you had formed of the little duties of religion led you insensibly to neglect the greatest of those duties ? You considered such and such practices as useless, under the pretext that perfection of virtue does not consist in fulfilling them ; and this false idea, after having led you into many irregularities, has conducted you, perhaps, to the greatest relaxation. Convinced, as you now are, that whe an affair is of consequence, everything is important nthat can preven the loss of it ; that, from the little, one easily passes to the great ; that the little even becomes great when we neglect it ; you should never voluntarily transgress the least observance of your Rule. You should not permit yourself anything under pretext of its being but a little sin, because everything is great before God, and often that which seems little, is of the greatest consequence in the eyes of God. You know not, but that the grace of perseverance is attached to that least observance, or that your destruction depends on the contempt you have for it. In a word, as there is a close connection between the greatest and the least ; as the great depends upon the least, and as the small are useless without the great, you should conduct yourself with regard to all your observances, in the manner which Jesus Christ Himself has prescribed, acquitting yourself of the great, and never neglecting the small, however inconsiderable they may seem.

Second Point.

How has it hitherto been with you, O my soul ? Every year, in your retreat, you renewed your good desires and

promises, but have you thought of renewing your life? You protested that you loved God, and would in future belong entirely to Him, but did your protestations prevent you from clinging to self? What did your apparent fervor and devotion produce in you? Was it simply the effect which fire usually produces on water? It penetrates it, heats it, makes it boil,—but how long? As long as the fire lasts, that is to say, some moments. When the fire is extinguished the water returns to its first state; it resumes its natural coldness; it is more susceptible of corruption, and freezes more easily than before.

Behold the fruit of past retreats! A little spell of devotion seized upon us, a spark of fervor heated us a little, a slight movement of zeal filled us with holy ardor,—but, for how long? Perhaps, for a day or two. Soon we returned to our first state; our fervor cooled, and our zeal lessened. We became more relaxed in our exercises, more negligent in our duties, colder towards God, more slaves of our passions and senses; in a word, we belonged less to God than before. This will again happen after this retreat, if we are not upon our guard. Let us, then, continually watch over ourselves, fear our weakness, and be faithful to God in all things.

Such, O Lord, is indeed the true portrait of my life. The more I advance in my career, the less I advance in the road of virtue; the older I grow in religion, the more fixed I become in my bad habits. I profit by nothing. I correct nothing. I am an unfaithful, ungrateful, and miserable creature, unworthy of Thy graces. After the many retreats that I have made, after so many promises and resolutions, I am still as tepid, as imperfect as before. What can I expect, O Lord, after so many graces despised, so many mercies abused, but a judgment without mercy? Ah! Lord, do not yet exercise it against me, I beseech Thee. I hope, with the assistance of Thy grace, to be more faithful than I have ever been. I wish this retreat to work in me what I have so long proposed to myself and what I promise Thee,—a true change. I resolve rather to die than to fail in the promise I now make to lead a new life. Yes, O my God, there is no sin that I will not, hereafter, try to avoid; no passion that I will not make

every effort to repress ; no bad habits that I will not destroy ; no inclinations, no natural propensity, against which I will not fight ; no creatures, from whom I will not detach myself ; nothing, in fine, that I will not do to live and die in the faithful observance of my Rules and Constitutions.

O ! Jesus, only Object of my love, I desire to enter into the dispositions of Thy Blessed Mother during the years she lived in the Temple, wholly consecrated to Thy love and service. I offer Thee her heart, her adoration and love. Accept mine with hers, and deign, O divine Jesus, to consign me, Thyself, to her care, to place me in her hands, that she may teach me to live to Thee alone, to become the humble, faithful child of Thy own most Sacred Heart. *Amen.*

ADVICE

ON

RETREATS,

BY

SAINT JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL.

RETREAT

OF

SAINT JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL.

VIVE JESUS!

LETTER OF OUR HOLY FOUNDESS, ST. JANE FRANCES
FREMYOT DE CHANTAL.

*Written by our dear and good Mother de Chantal, and
very instructive and useful for Retreats.*

MY DEAREST DAUGHTER :

It is your wish that I should tell you what you are to do in your retreat. Alas ! my daughter, you know that I am not capable of telling you much on that subject. Still to satisfy your good heart, and to condescend to your humility, I will tell you, that the first day of our retreat we must not at once set about making our confession, but must employ our time in recollecting and calming our soul before God, that like a tranquil lake under the bright sun, we may see clearly to the bottom. The following day, we must make our general examination, very quietly, without hurry, effort, or curiosity. I do not like much our getting accustomed to write at full length our annual confession, though, they who could not do otherwise are free to do so. Then, as the first three or four days are to be given to the purgative life, you may take the first or last meditations from Philothea, or some other in conformity with those. The following days, we must quietly reflect on what our sweet Saviour has done for love of us, and on what He does to redeem us. The last days, you can take some book which treats of the infinite love and eternal riches of this great God. Towards the end of the retreat, we must despoil our heart of all that clothes it, placing its garments, one after the other, at the feet of our Lord, beseeching Him to keep them, and clothe us with Himself. Thus stripped and despoiled before this divine Goodness, we must once more cast ourselves into the arms of His Providence, leaving to Him the care and government of our whole being ; and believe me, my daughter, nothing will be wanting to us. Let us never burden or clothe ourselves with any care, desire, affection, or constraint, for since we have abandoned all to our Lord, let us leave Him to

govern, and think solely how to please Him, whether by suffering or acting.

As regards gaining the indulgence granted to religious souls who make the retreat, you are not to have any fear that you are not gaining it because you cannot meditate in detail, nor discourse with your understanding at the time of prayer, God giving you, with His goodness, an occupation more simple and intimate. But this is what you are to do, my daughter; you are to read very attentively the points you would meditate upon if you were at liberty to do so, and as you read them recollect your soul devoutly in God. Thus, this reading will be to you instead of meditation; and by reading in this way, your mind will always receive good impressions from what you read, and though the profit be unknown to you, it is none the less for all that. Having done your duty by this reading, and continuing afterwards in prayer in your simple and loving manner, I tell you, that you do more than enough for the meditation; and for this reason, because God, infinite in greatness, comprehends all mysteries, and possessing God, you are excellently in the mystery which you had proposed to yourself for your meditation. A father of a religious Order, very spiritual, learned, and virtuous, has recently reconfirmed me in this opinion.

Indeed, my dearest daughter, this exercise of our annual retreats is a most important one. We must try to make them with the greatest possible devotion and fidelity. I think it will be very useful to your daughters, if you have read at table the book of "Exercises of Father Dom Sens of St. Catherine;" for, as his Lordship (that is our blessed Father, who was then alive), said to me, it is ample matter and written in a moving style, but a style of the saints, rejecting immortification, and detesting the researches of self-love. For meditation, your daughters must be given points that are pithy, unctuous, solid, and that stir the affections.

I am in divine love, my dearest daughter, your very humble and unworthy sister and servant in our Lord,

SISTER JANE FRANCES FREMYOT,

Of the Visitation of Holy Mary.

Blessed be God.

ADVICE.

OF

OUR HOLY FOUNDESS, ST. JANE FRANCES FREMYOT,
TO OUR SISTERS OF THE VISITATION.

On the Subject of the Meditations of Retreat.

MY DEAREST SISTERS :

We send you cordially this manuscript, because it is taken from the works of our Blessed Father, but especially from several little notes which we have found written by his dear and saintly hand. The ideas and words are his, and you will easily recognize his spirit in them. We have tried to reduce and arrange the whole in the form of Meditations, which may serve for the time of the retreats which are made before the renovation of vows, because several of our Sisters, the Superiors, had long been asking me to prepare some for them. I think that after the Meditations of the first and second part of Philothea, you will find nothing more solid or more useful for you. If you read and maturely consider them, they will fill your understanding with much light and necessary knowledge, and your hearts with holy affections.

The Meditations on silence, on modesty, and on some other religious virtues are wanting, because the subjects of them have not been found in the little memoranda of our Blessed Father. You may take them from the "Exercises of the Rev. Father Dom Sens," which our Blessed Father highly valued, or from other sources. Believe, my dear sisters, that we very heartily make you partakers of all that we have of our holy Founder's, since we are very desirous that you should live on and feed your souls on his holy and sweet doctrine ; God give us the grace to do so. Pray His Goodness for your unworthy Sister and servant in our Lord,

SISTER JANE FRANCES FREMYOT.

Blessed be God! Amen.

LIVE JESUS!

A PREFACE.

It has always been a custom among the children of God, who know the frailty and weakness of our nature, to renew their good purposes and holy resolutions. The Israelites, God's people, made their renewals at each new moon. To summon each one to do it, they blew the trumpet, and made a solemn feast to rouse the mind and raise it to the things of eternity.

Holy Church offers, from time to time, great festivals and solemnities to her children, that they may be renewed in the desire and purpose to do better. Religious of olden times used to take for this purpose the day of their profession and entrance into religion. But, inasmuch as the Daughters of the Visitation are not to become attached to particularities, the day of the Presentation, was most suitably chosen, that all of them together should come to offer their vows of renewal with the Blessed Virgin, who offers herself to God on this day. And in this, we verify what the prophet David had said, that many virgins should be brought to God, following after the most holy Virgin, to be offered to His divine Majesty. To the end that this may be done with more humility, it is very reasonable that we should prepare ourselves for it by solitude and a retreat of some days; for what, I pray you, are we going to do in our retreat, if not to renew our vows, revivify our soul, and confirm our resolutions?

As a man, who plays the lute with perfection, is wont to try all the strings, from time to time, to see if they do not require to be tightened or loosened, to render them in good tune according to the tone he wishes to give them; so we, also, every year in our retreat, should feel and consider all the affections of our soul, to see if they are in tune, to intone the canticle of the glory of God and of our own perfection. With this intent we make the yearly confessions, whereby we come to know all the strings that are discordant, the dispositions that are not yet mortified,

the resolutions that have not been faithfully practised : and having thus tightened the strings of our spiritual lute, we begin anew to sing the canticle of Divine Love, which consists in true observance ; and following our glorious Mistress, we come under her protection to offer ourselves on the altar of the divine Goodness, that we may be consumed without any reserve by the fire of His ardent charity.

To these holy words of our holy founder it has been thought good to add a counsel of a certain worthy servant of God, who, speaking of the profit we ought to draw from our retreat, says, that they, who love much talking generally come from their retreat lovers of silence and solitude ; they who were indifferent and indevout in the exercises of religion, come from it fervent, diligent, and prompt at their duty ; they who were lovers of their convenience are henceforth enemies of corrupt nature and great lovers of mortification, without which the spiritual life cannot subsist. If you have made a good retreat, you will have learned in it how to converse with God in reverence, humility, union, and love ; and by continual attention to His presence, to converse with yourself in purity of heart, in solitude, in peace, in true love of your spiritual good and hatred of yourself ; to converse with your sisters in charity, forbearance, and edification ; and with strangers, when it shall be required, in all modesty and devotion, showing them that you breathe only God ; in a word you will have learned to converse with your guardian angel and the saints, paying them visits and bringing them often to your mind. God give us this grace ! *Amen.*

In this first Monastery of the Visitation of holy Mary of Annecy, this 15th of August, 1637. Commenced under the protection of the triumphant Mother of God.

Blessed be God.

VIVE JESUS!

MEDITATIONS,

DRAWN FROM THE

WRITINGS OF OUR BLESSED FATHER,

Suitable for Retreats.

MEDITATION I.

ON CREATION.

First Point.

WHENCE are we? The country from which we came forth is nothingness. Where wast thou, my soul, so many years ago? Thou wast nothing, oh! nothing, without subsistence, or any being at all! Oh, nothingness! thou art my native country, wherein I dwelt unknown, vile and ever abject. "I have said to rottenness, thou art my father," said Job; but I have said to nothingness: thou art my country, I am taken from thy dark abyss and from thy frightful cavern.

Second Point.

Who has drawn us from nothingness? Who has given us being? Who is our Father? As the trees in winter contain their blossoms and fruits enclosed within themselves, still in their season they push them forth and make them appear: so God has had an eternal will to produce thee, oh my soul! and has held thee in His conception all ready to bring thee forth when the time should come! Oh! art thou not happy in being the daughter of so good a father?

Third Point.

When I was nothing, and sunk in the abyss of nothingness, the will of God was secretly preparing in His decree my being to give it me in time and place, as He has done. From nothingness proceeds our old animal man which is in us, and which is ever tending to its origin, to nothingness, to sin, and to evil. From God, proceeds our new Adam, the spiritual man which is in us, and is ever tending to its origin, to good, to virtue, and to the enjoyment of God.

First Affection.

Of myself then, what am I, but a mere nothing and child of nothingness? Poor and wretched as I am, in

what do I glory? wherefore do I esteem myself as something? Oh, nothingness! I will ever remember thee, will never exalt myself, but will abase my soul, bringing ever before its eyes its obscure and mean origin. Alas! it is hardly out of its shell, and it boasts of being great and magnificent.

Second Affection.

Oh God! what is my duty to Thy will which has so long and from eternity planned me in the designs of Thy Providence? O holy Will! I am Thine; do with me, in me, and by me whatever it shall please Thee, for I am Thy work. What rashness to have been a rebel against Thy Will which has produced me, and which alone preserves me.

Third Affection.

Ah! the heart of man! though high amid the low things of nature, is nevertheless, at the first look it casts upon God, led by its natural inclination to recognise its centre. Come, then, my poor heart, issue as a spark from the ashes of thy lowness, to render the love and obedience due to thy first beginning.

MEDITATION II.

ON THE END FOR WHICH WE ARE CREATED.

First Point.

CONSIDER that God has made us to His image and likeness, and He has created us thus that we may love Him. It is so true that our heart is created to love God, that as soon as it attentively thinks a little on the God-head, it feels a certain sweet emotion, which testifies that God is the God of our heart.

Second Point.

Consider that if God had not created man, He would, in truth, have been all good, but He would not have been

actually merciful, inasmuch as mercy is only exercised towards the miserable. Oh! sweet consolation! the sun is created to give light, the fire to burn, and so of other creatures. But thou, O my soul! poor and mean, thou art created in order that thou mayest be the theatre of the divine mercy!

Third Point.

Consider again, that you are created to go on your way continually to God. The rivers flow without ceasing, and, as says the wise man, return to the place whence they came forth. "O God," says St. Augustine, "Thou hast created my heart for Thyself, and never will it be at rest but in Thee; yes, Lord, for Thou art the God of my heart, my lot, and my portion.

First Affection.

Give thanks, O my soul! to this divine Master and Author of nature, Who gives thee daily as much assistance as is necessary for thee to go on thy way to the end for which He has created thee, that is to love Him. Cry out, then: Ah! I am not made for this world; there is a sovereign Workman, Who has made me for Himself. I must, therefore, tend towards Him, to be united and joined to His goodness whereto I belong.

Second Affection.

Oh! how sweet and desirable is the meeting of the riches of my God with my poverty! Ah! how happy am I to be placed in the world for so excellent an end, as to bring into fuller light the excess of a goodness so supremely charitable!

Third Affection.

Oh! all you who are on earth, you are pilgrims and are created to say with St. Augustine: "O to desire, to love, to walk, to attain to God!" Come, then, let us aim at our abiding city, the place of our rest. Our hearts should be as the sons of Jonadab who dared not build themselves houses on this earth. O religious soul! shake off all this

dust of earth from thy feet, for the ground on which thou walkest is holy, and the place which thou wishest to reach is all sanctified.

MEDITATION III.

ON BENEFITS.

First Point.

CONSIDER that God has made us as the perfection and abridgment of the universe. He has made our soul a storehouse of His riches, which made David say: "The marvels of the knowledge of God are seen in me."

Second Point.

Consider that God has been so liberal towards you, that He has made all this world for you. See my soul, heaven, earth, and every created thing; all has been made for thee, part for thy necessities, part for thy comfort and recreation. But how must thou use it? As Our Lord and the saints have done, soberly, holily, and devoutly. How have I used it? Superfluously, in a worldly, in a profane way: I have referred everything to myself, dwelling only in the pleasure I received, being like that bad merchant, to whom all was entrusted, and who made a bad use of all.

Third Point.

See, my soul, the multitude of benefits that God has distributed to thee: thou didst not die in thy mother's womb; thou hast been baptized, brought up in the Church, withdrawn from the company of worldlings, instructed in the way of the Spirit, inspired with a thousand inspirations, enlightened by a thousand lights, urged to a thousand good resolutions. What thanks oughtest thou to render for the same! But, O God! with how little fidelity has all that been husbanded! Alas! my soul! like a prodigal son, thou hast misused the goods and the goodness of thy Father. Still, return to Thy Father, for He is good and will receive thee.

First Affection.

O Lord! with what great gifts has thy liberal hand enriched this fair soul! Ah! is it not happy in having faith in our Saviour, hope through Him, affection and desire of obeying His divine will? O sovereign Giver! to fill up Thy benefits, grant this one more to my soul, that I may never abuse Thy divine gifts; make sure my faith, confirm my hope, increase my desire, warm my affections, so that I may become worthy of the surpassing benefit of the reception of Thy holy Body.

Second Affection.

Alas! how ungrateful have I been towards so kind and liberal a Lord, since I know that not only has He made for me all that I see, taste and feel, but His liberality passes still further, for eye has not seen, nor ear heard, the great and good things He reserves for me, if I am a loyal servant. Ah! my King! every moment I receive the effects of Thy liberality, and I scarcely say to Thee one word of thanksgiving; and, notwithstanding, as no moment passes that I enjoy not Thy benefits, none ought to slip by without my sending Thee acts of thanksgiving. My soul, how shall we practice this? unless by using this world well and religiously, as if we use it not, that all our life may be an act of thanksgiving; and to that end, we must be attached to the Giver and not to His gifts.

Third Affection.

Alas! my Benefactor! David said: "What shall I render to the Lord for all the things He hath rendered to me?" Ah! ought not the religious soul find still greater difficulty in making her acknowledgments to Thee! O God of all goodness, it is a small matter if I make Thee a holocaust of myself; still, if it please Thee to ask for my heart, here, Lord, I give it Thee, and may it never return into my possession.

MEDITATION IV.

ON SIN.

First Point.

WE are not afraid of sin, because we do not consider enough the evil thereof ; for sin is an aversion, or turning aside from God, and a turning to the creature, and it is in this separation from God that the principal evil of sin consists. Alas ! consider how many times you have separated yourself from this good God. Ah ! my soul, you should say, is it possible that thou takest pleasure in turning away from the source of all good, to go into the abyss of sin ?

Second Point.

Consider that there are many woeful steps by which the soul goes down to perdition ; ingratitude, attention to human things in place of divine things, the habit of frivolous and superfluous thoughts, the unhappy custom of speaking ill of our neighbor. Moreover, by speaking of the ill deeds of others, we lose the shame of our own. From this we descend to the next step, which is to forget to have recourse to God by prayer, and at last, we are precipitated into such misfortune, that without remorse we drink iniquity like water. O soul, designed for eternal happiness, I show thee this woeful descent, that thou mayest withdraw thy feet from these evil steps !

Third Point.

Consider that those are lost with Cain, who will not make a good confession, or who make it from habit, without true remorse for their sins and without a firm purpose to amend. Those, who make a good Confession are saved with the good thief, and with Job, who declared that he would not keep his sin in his bosom, but accused himself of his faults. Alas ! we sin in body and soul by innumerable ways of omission, of commission, and inadvertence ;

and they deceive themselves, who, because they are in religion and free from grievous sins, which are more visible, esteem their faults small, and fail to have sorrow for them. For, however small our sins, this is great ingratitude towards God, and He alone knows the gravity of our sins and not we.

First Affection.

Come, my soul, let us draw nigh to God. He receives sinners; let us not leave our Jesus any more. Hear Him calling: "Return, return, wandering children, who desert your Father." Ah! Lord, behold I come to Thee because Thou hast called me; receive me, according to Thy word, and I shall live! No, Lord, no, by the help of Thy grace, I will never separate myself from Thee! Alas! I have done so but too often, and I repent thereof with all my heart!

Second Affection.

O God, full of clemency! Thy mercy is greater than my iniquity! If Thou didst chastise me according to Thy justice, what would become of me? for I see that there is not one of these evil steps on which I have not placed my foot. Therefore, O my Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before Thee, and am not worthy to be called Thy child; nevertheless, I still aspire to this happiness.

Third Affection.

Ah! Lord, henceforth, with Thy grace, I will accuse myself of my sins with great sorrow, never esteeming a fault small, since it is the great God Whom my sins defy. Ah! Lord, Thou waitest for the conversion of the sinner, but Thou wilt not always be silent if he does not amend. Thou must then, my wretched heart, melt in holy contrition and penitence, from the sole consideration of the infinite goodness of God, Whom Thou hast offended, and be filled with a lively resolution of dying rather than sinning wilfully. O Lord, Who seest the weakness of my heart, strengthen me by Thy help, that this resolution may be efficacious.

MEDITATION V.

ON DEATH.

First Point.

CONSIDER, O mortals, that it is a great reproach to die without having thought of it. Death, which has dominion over this perishable life, keeps no ordinary rule. It takes now here, now there, without choice or method, the good among the wicked, the young among the old. Oh! happy are they who live in continual fear of dying, and who are ever ready to die, so that they may live again forever in the life where there is no death!

Second Point.

Consider that God having placed us in the house of this world, on some day that He knows and that we know not, will call us before Him with this summons: "Come and give an account of thy stewardship, of thy Vows, of thy Rule and observances; in short, of all the goods over which I have set thee." Alas! what will be the issue of this account? I know not, for all things will remain uncertain till the time to come.

Third Point.

Consider that the just man dies not unexpectedly; for, to have persevered in Christian justice and in religious observance to the end is to have well provided for his death. Therefore, the Church bids us ask not merely that we may not die a sudden death, but an unprovided death.

First Affection.

Were the religious state to bring no other good than that of a perpetual preparation for death, it should be held in great respect. Ah! my soul, death teaches us, every day, that the greatness of the world is nothing but an

illusion and a lie, and that the life of man fleets away like a passing puff of wind. Come, then, let us throw ourselves at the feet of the immortal King, Whose death is more worthy of love than the life of all the kings of earth. Ah, sweet Jesus! give me the good remembrance of death which destroys sin, which humbles me when I think of my dust, and makes me despise all things that perish.

Second Affection.

O my Blessed Father! ah! you died no unprovided death, you, who were so deeply attentive, and on the watch to hear the signal for departure, and who used to say: "I am thinking of my equipment for the great eternal journey." Ah! how attentive I ought to be to this practice which you have appointed for us, of sighing over the hours passed uselessly, since we shall have to give account of them all, at the day of death. Take care, O my soul! how thou observest all that belongs to thy Institute; for I warn thee that account must be given of all to our great Judge. O Jesus! remember that Thou art at the same time, both my Judge, my Father, and my Saviour.

Third Affection.

Alas! when I think how I have employed God's time, I am greatly troubled that He will not give me His eternity, since He only gives it to those who will employ their time, said our holy founder. If this faithful servant said that of himself, what must I say of myself, unjust steward? O my sweet Jesus! bowed down before Thee, I entreat Thee not to enter into strict account with Thy servant, for who could endure Thy wrath? But rather give me this grace, that in imitation of my Blessed Father, I may take care to serve Thee well, so as to be able to leave and abandon to Thee all care of my death.

MEDITATION VI.

ON JUDGMENT.

First Point.

CONSIDER, my soul, that thou art indeed insensible, if thou tremblest not at the remembrance of this last day, whereon a consuming fire will come before the presence of the Judge; thunders and tempests will roar round about Him, the waves will be lifted up and will cast forth flames, the monsters of the deep and the beasts of the earth will howl lamentably and horribly, and when the Judge shall come, He will shake the heavens, the stars will fall at His feet, the moon will become like blood, the sun will become dark, black, and give no light. O God! what convulsion in nature! but it is God's doing, for the universe is so noble that no one can destroy it but its creator.

Second Point.

Consider that Jesus being seated on the judgment seat, and all nations before Him, He will separate, as shepherds do, the goats from the sheep, and will imprint in a wondrous manner on the spirits of the damned a fearful sense of their loss; for the divine Majesty will make them see clearly the beauty of His face, and the treasures of His bounty. When they see this infinite abyss of delights, their will, by an extreme effort, will wish to spring towards Him to be united to Him and enjoy His love; but to no purpose, for as soon as the divine beauty shall have penetrated the understanding of these unhappy beings, the divine justice will so deprive their will of strength, that it will be utterly unable to love this lovable object, and they will hear this frightful sentence: "Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire."

Third Point.

And the Judge, turning towards His dear sheep, shall say to them : “ Come ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you.” Then shall the force of the command to love cease and give place to the force of pleasure, and then shall we see that the commandment of love given by our king Jesus to the citizens of the militant Jerusalem, has only been to merit for them citizenship in the triumphant Jerusalem.

First Affection.

O sovereign Judge ! when all human nature will have gone forth into eternity, Thou wilt break the shell of this visible world ; I adore Thy power, but I invoke Thy mercy ; for, in this day of Thine anger, if the pillars of heaven tremble with fear, what shall it be in my heart which, as a little straw, is agitated by every wind ? Alas, O God ! Thou wilt render to each according to His works ; I must not, therefore, be anxious about anything but to do good works for this will be the day of Thy general remuneration. Yes, even the earth, O my God ! which has borne Thine elect shall be changed in form and made brighter than a mirror : the sun shall have seven times more brightness than it now has, and the moon shall be bright as the sun : ah ! how delightful will it be to see our king Jesus in the day of His majesty.

Second Affection.

What do I say ? In that day, alas ! what will it profit the wicked to see Him if they cannot love Him ? Ah ! Lord, deliver me from this eternal sadness and from the immortal despair of those who shall find themselves in an impossibility, and even in a dreadful aversion to love such loving goodness.

My soul, it is now for thee to judge, condemn, and cor-

rect thyself, and give thyself up to the solid virtues of thy vocation, for even though in that day of terror thou wert to say: "Lord, I have raised the dead and worked miracles in Thy name," thou shouldst still hear these fearful words: Depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity, I know you not, for you have not observed your Vows and Rules."

Third Affection.

O saintly and blessed company, be ye for ever blessed. Ah! you are blessed because you have been simple and obedient as sheep; make me, O sweet Jesus, my good Master, bless Thee by my good works throughout this life, that Thou mayest bless me throughout Thy eternity, and give Thy right hand to the work of Thy hands.

MEDITATION VII.

ON HELL.

First Point.

CONSIDER that after the judgment the reprobate spirits, with their bodies, the accomplices of their crimes and companions of their pains, will enter forever into their terrible abode, and will dwell for eternity in this place of darkness and horror, where there is no order, but frightful confusion.

Second Point.

These unhappy beings will dwell in their infernal prison, full of despairing rage at knowing such supreme loving perfection, and never being able to have the love and enjoyment thereof, because while they could have loved and served it, they have not been willing, and this teaches me that I must work while I have the light.

Third Point.

Consider, that among all the woes of these wretches. is this one, that they will burn with a thirst the more violent, as the remembrance of the beauteous eternal source will sharpen their ardor and they will be forever like mad dogs perishing with hunger the more vehement as their memory will increase its insatiable cruelty by the remembrance of the eternal banquet whereof they are deprived, and cursing one another, they will, in turn, curse their Creator, seeing that forever and always, they will be miserable in eternity.

First Affection.

O God ! when I see Adam and Eve come forth from the earthly Paradise, after having been filled with so many graces, laden with their sin, so full of misery that we may say : “ Who are these that are leaving Paradise, thus abounding in calamities ? I am all astonished ; but, O Saviour of the world ! I am far more so, when I see a soul brought up in the Paradise of the Church, enriched with her treasures, capable of eternal felicity, descend by her fault into eternal misery ! Oh ! God, my God ! I say, she might have been Thy Spouse, and behold she is Thy enemy ; she might have enjoyed the triumphant Church, and behold she is a citizen of the infernal Babylon. Oh sin, oh self-will ! it is you who led this miserable soul into this disaster, you, therefore, I detest with all my strength.

Second Affection.

O, religious souls ! make haste to serve God, and to enter on the narrow way of your observances, for it leads to life ! O ! my sweet Jesus, turn away my steps from that broad and wide, sensual, self-willed and idle road that leads to eternal death, and into which so many enter ! Keep me also from following that double and crooked way, which leads hypocrites to destruction.

Third Affection.

O religious souls ! you have so many means of becoming perfect, you are on the mystical ladder whose top is in heaven. Ah ! if by your disorders you cast yourselves into the eternal abyss, how deeply will you be fixed therein ; even in the lowest depths, says a contemplative saint. O most holy Virgin ! do not permit that any of the sheep of your flock should ever be cast among the goats and wolves of hell.

Ah ! Mother of all sweetness, I fly from hell, because neither your Son nor you are loved there ; for the blessed would esteem themselves damned if they were deprived a moment of this love. O Mother of holy love ! make me so begin to love, that I may love eternally your most holy Son.

MEDITATION VIII.

ON PARADISE.

First Point.

CONSIDER, that God, being more inclined to reward than to punish, will give an infinite glory to His blessed whom He will place in His triumphant kingdom. Oh ! how delightful is this place ; it is a place full of ornament, of splendor, and of glory ! “ O City of God ! holy Jerusalem,” says St. Augustine, “ how happy were my soul did she deserve to behold thy glory, thy beauty, thy gates, thy walls, thy streets. Thy houses are of precious stones, thy gates of fine pearls, thy streets of purest gold ; into thee nothing enters that is not clean ; in a word, holy Jerusalem, thou art beautiful and sweet with delights.”

Second Point.

Consider that it is good to see this city, where the great King is seated in His majesty, surrounded by all His blessed servants. There are the bands of angels who sing hymns, and the company of the heavenly citizens; there are the venerable band of the prophets, the sacred number of the apostles, the victorious army of the innumerable martyrs, the august rank of the pontiffs, the sacred choir of the confessors, the true and perfect religious, the saintly women, the humble widows, the pure virgins! The glory of each is not equal, but still they all receive one same pleasure, for full and perfect charity reigns there.

Third Point.

Consider that, for eternity, these happy souls are in the enjoyment of this bliss which consists in this, that God gives Himself wholly to each. The eternal Son says graciously to His Father: "Father, I will that where I am, they also whom Thou hast given Me may be with Me: that they may see My glory which Thou hast given Me, before the creation of the world." And turning to His dear children, He says: "Did I not tell you, that whosoever should love Me, should be loved by My Father, and that We would manifest Ourselves to him?" Then this holy company, overwhelmed with pleasure in the bosom of the Godhead, chants the eternal Alleluia of rejoicing and of praise to their Creator.

First Affection.

I hail thee from afar, O my most holy mother, Jerusalem, full of all beauty, enlightened by the Sun of Justice, and of whom the white and spotless Lamb is the beautiful and resplendent light, thy glory and all thy good! O God of life! how desirable are Thy palaces; here is the place where Thou scatterest all Thy delights! Ah! poor moment of this life, I cannot love thee except so far as thou mayest help me to journey to this holy eternity! Ah! how wearisome is earth, how displeasing its pleasures when I turn my eyes to thee, O my lovely Sion?

Second Affection.

Blessed courtiers of this great King, now, indeed, you experience in the joy of your Lord, that he, who is faithful in little is set over much! Ah! answer me, by what road did you reach this happy abode? By patience, by faith, by hope, meekness, and by charity and humility. I am here below, that I may mount by the same steps of holy virtues; extend to me your helping hands, lest my weakness make me rather stumble below, than mount to your desirable and beauteous company.

Third Affection.

Courage, my soul, let us labor and fight! this fair kingdom is only given to conquerors. But, my God, Thou art my beatitude! Thee, then, I will seek, the God of paradise, and not the paradise of God! Ah! what grace to see forever the Spouse in His noonday, the Lord face to face, to love Him and bless Him forever!

MEDITATION IX.

ON RELIGIOUS POVERTY.

First Point.

“BLESSED are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!” Cursed, then, are the rich in spirit, who love the things of earth; for the misery of hell is for them. You have taken a vow of poverty; oh, happy, then, are you if you observe it, and how you ought to think yourself honored to be in such holy company! Our Lord, our Lady, Saint Joseph, were poor; love, then, this holy virtue, as the dear friend of Jesus Christ, Who lived and died in poverty.

Second Point.

Consider that the meaning of poverty is the having need of and being in want of many things. See the ex-

ample of the poor and divine Jesus. "The foxes," said He, "have holes, and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." Oh, religious! who have vowed to be poor with Jesus Christ, do you not blush for shame, when you wish to have your conveniences at the appointed time, and to want for nothing, you, who ought to desire and be glad, if you had not even necessary things, who ought, I say, to rejoice exceedingly, if, with your Spouse, you had not where to lay your head!

Third Point.

Weigh seriously, the obligation of your vow. You are to live, not only in a perfect abnegation of the things you shall use, but, also, in a poverty entirely stripped of all things according to your holy Constitutions. You are to remark that the religious, who wishes to be attached to time, to place, to creatures, esteem, and consolations, mistakes her true nature and is not poor, for she makes her riches of all these things, and, therefore, is not in the nakedness of heart and poverty of spirit which she professes.

First Affection.

I give Thee thanks, Lord, that Thy bounty has placed me here, where, among Thy spouses, the words *mine* and *thine* are not heard except on this one subject, where it was permitted to the lover to say: "My beloved is all mine." Ah! Lord! give me a true love of this beloved poverty with all its inconveniences, keep me from that ambition, which is but too prevalent, of desiring the honor of being accounted poor, and of possessing at the same time all the conveniences of riches.

Second Affection.

O my God, I ought to humble myself profoundly, in seeing Thee, King of all things, not having even where to lay Thy head, and I, poor worm of earth, so well provided for in all my necessities. My ingratitude has reached that point, that I wish to have in the monastery, in the holy

house of the poor, the superfluities, and all the conveniences of worldlings, which I should not have had even in the world. O Lord! Who, for love of me didst embrace poverty, I throw myself at Thy feet to repent of this disorder.

Yes, Lord, I will observe my vow with all fidelity. I will cherish and conceal between Thee and me the little privations that shall come upon me. I will love vile and coarse things, as being those which really belong to me; in a word, I ask of Thee this grace, that all the days of my life I may be like a poor person, in my office, at work, in food, in dress, in sickness, in health, in all.

Third Affection.

God of all goodness, Who hast said of old: "I will not that they, who serve Me in My temple, should have any inheritance, for I will be their portion." Ah! my Lord! whence comes it that so many souls in religion possess Thee not, unless because they wish to possess something else? Come, then, my soul, let us divest ourselves of all! Depart from me goods and conveniences of the body, depart vain consolations; begone from my heart superfluous affections, for, henceforth, I will render my vows to my God, Who is my lot, my portion, and my eternal possession, of which I enjoy so much the less, the more I wish to enjoy other things!

MEDITATION X.

ON OBEDIENCE.

First Point.

CONSIDER what is the religious obedience which you have vowed. It is a complete resignation of all human will, says St. Climacus, a voluntary death, a life without curiosity, a sure way that seeks no excuse before God, a voyage, the tomb of our own will, and an awakening of

humility. Alas! see how badly you have observed so worthy a virtue; if you do not practice it aright, you expose your soul to all the evils contrary to the above virtues.

Second Point.

To excite yourself more to the practice of this virtue, consider the meek Jesus in the house of St. Joseph, retired, apart from the world, and being in all things obedient. It was there that He began the monastic life; but, my God! wherein did He obey? In things low and vile, in helping to handle a saw, or a plane, He, the God of all majesty and all glory; and we, creatures full of all meanness and abjection, scarcely embrace with joy an obedience, if our own glory and satisfaction are not attached thereto.

Third Point.

Reflect on these holy words of our Saviour: "I came down from heaven, not do My own will, but the will of Him that sent me," and say: "O my God! I am not come into this holy monastery to do my own will, but that of my Father in heaven, Who has sent me hither by His inspiration, and this holy will I find in my rules, in my observances, and in all that my superiors ordain for me." Truly, the religious, who wishes to have any will of her own in a monastery, imitates not her Spouse; and, therefore, on the day of judgment, she will deserve to be judged with the worldly and wilful. O God! what confusion!

First Affection.

Lord, I confess that all is sure in obedience, and all is uncertain apart from it. Alas! what great evil I have done, by letting my own will live!

What misery! I have taken myself back, after having given myself to Thee! ah! Lord, I repent of this fault, and throwing myself again into the arms of obedience and of my superiors, I resolve, with Thy grace, to walk on blindly, not looking by what road they lead me, but only to the blessed country whither they are leading me, to Thy holy eternity.

Second Affection.

Ah! my meek and obedient Lord, how ill-advised have I been, when I have preferred obedience in high things rather than in lowly ones! No, my God, permit not that this disorder come upon me, but make me regard with a devout eye the meanest things, as exercises in which I may imitate more easily Thy holy humanity brought low and humiliated. May it then never happen to me to murmur at what I am commanded, nor to find fault with the employments given me, but may I rejoice with sincere affection that my meat and sweetest food are to do all things according to holy obedience.

Third Affection.

O! my own judgment, seducer of my will! It is time that I destroy thee, otherwise thou wilt destroy me. Ah! my God, no, I will not cut off my own will because it leads me to evil, but because it hinders me from following Thee. O Thou, Who hast been obedient even to death, and the death of the cross, make me to live and die only by obedience! Alas! our Saviour will not do His all holy will, and dare I ever presume to do mine, which is all evil?

MEDITATION XI.

ON CHASTITY.

First Point.

CONSIDER the favor that God has done you, in having chosen you for His Spouse, since, ordinarily, a maiden changes her condition into that of her husband, and becomes a queen if he is king. See with what reverence you ought to esteem this grace. "They have been made abominable as the things they loved," says the prophet, speaking of the wicked; and we may say of the good, that they become lovely as the things they love.

Second Point.

See to what happiness God has called you. They who remain in the world run great risk of offering God a divided heart, and on that account of seeing the heavenly Spouse refuse it, saying: "You cannot serve two masters." But, souls who leave absolutely all, to consecrate themselves to God, are delivered from this danger. They should bar the door of their hearts with the bar of a chaste fear, so that nothing may enter therein, but what tends to the love and service of their Spouse.

Third Point.

Turn over in your mind the interior perfection to which this vow obliges you, drawing it from the words of the rule, which gives you liberty to live, breathe, or aspire, only for the heavenly Spouse. If you must still have conversation, let it be unspotted and angelic. Ah! blessed are the pure and clean of heart, for they shall see God!

First Affection.

O Jesus! dear Spouse of pure souls, I admire the excess of Thy goodness, which, having chosen me for a dignity so great as that of Thy spouse, has not yet cast me off, seeing that I have so often failed in fidelity to Thee. For this reason, I return a thousand thanks to Thy supreme goodness. My soul, humble thyself profoundly before this great company of virgins, who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, and His most holy Mother! Entreat them to present you to Jesus, King of virgins; and let us be devout to our good angel, for these heavenly spirits take pleasure in guarding the bed of King Solomon, the pure, humble, devout and faithful soul.

Second Affection.

My beloved, that I may keep for Thee alone the garden of my heart, do me the grace, that I may set it round about with the thorns of holy mortification, that I may

close the doors and windows of my senses, so that none of my thoughts may ever get abroad, but that my whole soul may remain entirely occupied with Thee, O my only consolation and my most sweet refuge!

Third Affection.

When shall it be, my God, that, assisted by Thy grace, I shall walk in my way, according to the whole extent of my obligations, and that the words of my vows shall be ever before my eyes, so that avoiding error, immortification of the senses, useless occupations of mind, I may only aspire to and breathe for Thee? Grant me this favor, O my God! and may the things of the world rather turn for me into bitterness and mortification, that Thou alone mayest be sweet to my soul, and my thoughts have no pleasure but in Thy supreme sweetness.

MEDITATION XII.

TO HELP US TO KNOW OUR MISERY AND WEAKNESS.

First Point.

WHAT is the human creature, but a thin smoke that is dispersed, and as Job says, "a vain leaf shaken by the wind, the sport of evil, inconstancy without firmness, and, in the end, the prey of the sepulchre." But even this same misery has reached such an extremity by the freedom of its depraved will, that it turns almost everything to its own injury, and breaks its neck on the living stone which was placed to support and steady it.

Second Point.

Look how little you can do of yourself, being so insignificant: much evil and no good. You can fall into a thousand sins and remain in this miserable state, without the power of rising of yourself, until the Lord, by lights,

fears, remorse, and salutary motions, makes you return to Him. Say then with St. Augustine : “ O Lord, without Thee, I can go to death, but never without Thee can I find the way of life.”

Third Point.

Consider, further, that your frailty is so great, that when you are in the way of virtue, you cannot walk therein of yourself. If our Lord, by a continual care, watched not over your conduct, you would sin every moment, and you would fall.

O religious soul ! beware lest the Lord make this complaint of thee : “ Israel was weak, I guided him Myself, but he has shaken off My hand and lost himself.”

First Affection.

Ah ! Lord, be my helper ! but rather make haste to help me ! Alas ! I am only an atom and a nothing ; yet I wish to raise myself. O my God ! I will say with David, Thou art my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation ; take me from the guidance of my own will, and let Thy right hand uphold Thy feeble servant.

Second Affection.

But, O my God, if owing to my wretchedness, it happens that I fall into this miserable precipice of sin, ah ! look on me with Thine eye of favor ; for without Thy help, I cannot so much as have the thought of rising from this abyss. My dear soul, understand thy misery, and, therefore, keep thyself most humble and dependent on Thy divine spouse.

Third Affection.

Lord, I confess that my beginning, my perseverance, and my end depend on Thee. Ah ! if Thy goodness had not hitherto helped me, I had fallen. Oh, Thou that ledest Israel ! no, never, by Thy grace, will I let go Thy gentle hand, which carries and leads me by the way of Thy will ! Ah ! rather, Lord let Thy right hand be under

my head, and let Thy left hand embrace me ; thus shall I see, that I have nothing that I have not received from Thy bounty. Of what, then, can I boast, unless of this, that I am nothing and my God is all?

MEDITATION XIII.

ON THE SUBMISSION OUR SAVIOUR PRACTISED IN HIS
DIVINE CHILDHOOD.

First Point.

CONSIDER first the submission of this eternal Son to the will of His heavenly Father. Seeing that He wished to save man, He offered Himself and submitted to come down to earth and be enclosed in the pure womb of the most holy Virgin. He who was so great, all-seeing, all-powerful, all-perfect, refused not, and as the church sings, abhorred not this little, dark and narrow prison, because such was His Father's will.

Second Point.

Consider that this good Saviour, having submitted to the office of Redeemer of men, submitted so completely to all belonging thereto, that He was content to hide His eternal wisdom under the veil of childhood. He, Who was the uncreated Word, submitted to be silent, and not to speak sooner than ordinary children ; in short He Who was rich, mighty, immortal, submitted to appear poor, feeble and mortal. And I, a little worm of the earth, I wish to speak and exalt myself.

Third Point.

Consider how far the submission of this divine Saviour extended, since the Evangelist says, that He was obedient in all things to the most holy Virgin and the glorious St. Joseph. At the mercy of their guidance, He allows Himself to be carried back and forth, and turned in every direc-

tion with equal indifference, because, without doubt, He regarded them as persons commissioned by His eternal Father for the guidance of His most holy childhood.

First Affection.

O eternal God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who for our good hast sent Him from Thy bosom to take upon Him our life, that He might give us His; ah! send into my heart affections of gratitude, and to my lips words of thanksgiving for this benefit! O good Jesus! how happy should I be, if, according to my littleness, I could enter into the imitation of Thy submission! If obedience were to send me here, or leave me there, or commission me to something, I should find no place too little, too inconvenient; all would be well received by my will, if it were submissive to that of Thy heavenly Father. Is it possible, O my God! that I can see Thee undertake so much for me, and that I will undertake nothing for Thee? Thou must, O my soul! take courage, to imitate Thy Spouse; ascend to Him by this happy descent of submission.

Second Affection.

Ah! my Lord, since to obey Thee I have embraced the religious vocation; so to imitate Thee, I will, with Thy grace, submit myself to Thy example in all that depends on and belongs to this state. Being nothing, I will desire to appear to be nothing. Having to become as a little child, that I may gain the kingdom of heaven, I will keep silence, and be as one unable to speak, unless for charity or necessity; such are the desires of my heart. But, O gentle and divine Child! from Thee, and not from myself, I look for the grace, the strength, and the fidelity I need to effect this.

Third Affection.

What dost Thou teach me, O my divine Master! by Thy submission to the most holy Virgin and St. Joseph, but to ask for nothing and refuse nothing; but to keep myself wholly dependent on the will and direction of my

superiors, whom the heavenly Father has appointed for me? Ah! my God, how ashamed I ought to be when I see Thee obedient in all things, and myself so often rebellious! Permit no more, O Lord, that this misery befall me, but grant me this mercy, that by adoring Thy submission, I may enter on the practice of this holy virtue.

MEDITATION XIV.

ON THE INCOMPARABLE GRACE OF BEING DAUGHTERS OF
HOLY CHURCH.

First Point.

CONSIDER that Jesus Christ came into this world in order to establish His holy Church, as the mother of all the children of salvation. This is a work so excellent, that He Himself was to be the Founder: "Peter," said He, "thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Second Point.

Look at the majesty and holiness of this Church. Jesus Christ is her head, she is His only Spouse; whoever is not a child of this holy Mother, cannot be a child of God. Oh! how rich she is! the keys of heaven are given her, the sacraments are her treasures, and the triumphant Jerusalem is her own sister.

Third Point.

Consider the excellent grace God has bestowed on you in making you daughters of this Church. This was the whole glory of the saints. "I value myself for nothing," St. Catherine used to say, "except for being a christian;" and another martyr sang as he died: "I am the son of a Mother, the most holy Church, whose true children never die." St. Teresa could not thank God enough for being a daughter of His Church.

Our holy Founder held it for his happiness in this world to employ his labors and his life in the service of this true Spouse of Jesus Christ. "Ah!" he used to say, "how I feel my courage animated beyond measure to serve more faithfully than ever the Church of the living God, and the God living in the Church." In short, the saints had no other happiness, and they were consumed with gratitude; and, perhaps, you have never thought of rendering thanks to God for so great a benefit.

First Affection.

Lord, though my heart were to melt with love and thanksgiving to Thee for having built this holy Church for us, I should not even then be doing all I ought to do. When I consider her, I cannot refrain from saying with David: "Blessed be the work of the hands of my God, and blessed be we forever in His work!"

Second Affection.

Hail to thee, only dove without spot, pillar of all firmness, house of the King, Mother most benignant, who receivest repentant sinners and reconcilest them with God, Mother most kind, feeding thy children with the Bread of Life, and giving them to drink of the very Blood of the Spouse! Ah! how I will love my religious vocation! Certainly, my God, I believe that Thou hast given it to me only that I might render myself a more worthy daughter of a Mother so worthy! O holy Spouse of the divine Bridegroom! I will, His grace helping me, embrace all thy maxims, honor all thy holy ceremonies, and drink thy doctrine as a saving draught!

Third Affection.

My soul be astounded! ah! Lord, who am I that Thou shouldst have placed me in this Tabernacle of the just among the company of Thy holy apostles, of Thy martyrs, of Thy venerable pontiffs and confessors, of Thy most pure virgins, and of all Thy beloved elect? I confess, O

my God, that this is the grace of graces, and that Thy grace alone has given it to me. O holy company of the elect of my Lord Jesus, ah! who will do me this favor, unless you by your prayers, that I may never render myself unworthy of your society, but that rather in this world, as a generous daughter of the Church militant, I may never cease to combat against myself, and that my heart may ascend in virtue, until I arrive at the triumphant Jerusalem in your sweet company!

MEDITATION XV.

ON THE SINGULAR BENEFITS OF THE RELIGIOUS VOCATION.

First Point.

CONSIDER that Solomon having weighed everything under heaven, assures us that it is nothing but vanity and affliction of spirit. What is it, then, that we quit for God, when we enter the religious life? Verily only phantoms and appearances of good, and, as the prophet assures us that all things are as if they were not before God, so all is nothing, O God, and what have we given up for our own part? Still our wretchedness is so great, and we are struck with such blindness, that we persuade ourselves we have done a great thing for God in leaving these nothings; and all the time, O Lord! it is Thou, Who hast done a great thing for us, by making us leave them!

Second Point.

Consider that you were not capable of giving yourself to so holy a vocation. It is God who has called you to it, by an incomparable love, constraining you without violence to come out of Sodom and enter into his banquet chamber. The religious life is not a natural life, it is above nature; grace must give it, and must be the soul of this.

Third Point.

Consider what gratitude you ought to have to this divine Saviour, Who has deigned by the interposition of His most holy Mother, to change for you water into wine, and render you wholly His. Ask of God a lively gratitude for this grace, for it is not less than the grace of vocation itself. The ingratitude of the children of Israel, who had been withdrawn from the bondage of Egypt into the solitude of the desert, angered the Lord so greatly, that He was minded to exterminate them all.

First Affection.

O Lord ! what have I left in quitting the world, but a poverty full of cares, or some poor possession full of unrest ? I have quitted trouble, anguish, dissension, continual occasions of being lost, and Thou hast given me a peaceful life, tranquil, full of holy union, and furnished with a thousand means of uniting my soul to Thee. Alas ! O my God ! I confess that Thou hast done much for me, and I have done nothing for Thee, by entering into this calling. I am a useless servant, yea, even an ungrateful one, if I do not that for which Thou hast called me to Thy service.

Second Affection.

What shall I render Thee, my God, for this precious benefit, which Thou hast bestowed on me ? I will pay Thee my vows by a punctual observance in the sight of Thy people ; that is to say, my King, that by Thy grace I will live as a true religious, my soul always raised to Thee, doing continual violence to my nature, loving self-contempt, without ever blaming those who shall blame me, or departing from the narrow way that leads to life. Ah ! most holy Virgin, since it is by means of thee that I have this favor of dwelling in thy house all the days of my life, favorably help me that I may so live therein that thou mayest not deny me the grace to be acknowledged as Thy daughter.

Third Affection.

Lord, Who didst say of old : “ What could I have done for Israel that I have not done?” methinks these words are addressed to my soul. O unwise religious ! what has not the Lord done for you, and you return Him not the thanks that are due ? Alas ! you ought to be full of joy at seeing yourself out of Egypt, and keep yourself lovingly in retirement, solitary, fleeing all that savors of the world. And on the contrary, you are irritating the spouse, seeking, perhaps, your satisfaction and convenience, even more than if you were still in the world. O my Beloved ! I confess that I have not deserved to taste Thy sweet manna ; but, henceforth, I renounce all, I am dead to the world, and bless a thousand times the day that I died thereto, that I might live only to Thee.

MEDITATION XVI.

THAT THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OBLIGES US STRICTLY TO FOLLOW
OUR SAVIOUR.

First Point.

CONSIDER that our Saviour, calling His disciples, said to them : “ Follow Me.” Whether they were fishing, as St. Peter and St. Andrew, whether they were mending their nets, as the sons of Zebedee, whether they were at the receipt of custom, as St. Mathew, all had the same summons : “ Follow Me,” teaching me that all those, who are called to the religious life and evangelical perfection are called to follow our Saviour in His Humanity, practising virtue after His example.

Second Point.

Consider how we must follow our Saviour, and learn this from His own words. “ If any man come after Me,” says He, “ let him deny himself, and take up his cross and

follow Me." But, O divine Saviour! whither shall we follow Thee? All the time of Thy life, Thou hast walked only in the paths of perfect poverty, of continual contempt, abasement and abjection before creatures, and of continual toil. Is it, then, by these paths that we must follow Thee? Is it in these things that the religious soul is obliged to follow Thy steps? O great, but precious self-denial!

Third Point.

Consider into what misery they fall, who, after having undertaken to follow our Saviour, turn back. Alas! such, says He, are not fit for the kingdom of heaven, any more than they, who walk only virtuously in some one thing, and who are stationary in other things. "I tell you weeping" said St. Paul in his ardor, "that there are some who walk as enemies of the Cross of Jesus Christ, whose end is destruction."

First Affection.

O Lord! of Whom it is written, that having gone up to the mountain, Thou didst call to Thee those, whom it pleased Thee to choose to be of Thy disciples, I am come to Thee on this mountain of religious perfection, because Thou hast called me. Receive me according to Thy word and I shall live. But, Lord, how shall I be able to follow Thee, Thou, Who, as the Prophet declares, art come as a giant to run Thy course from the height of heaven in this world! Ah! Thou must be my strength, and the speed of my feet. O careless religious, why follow ye your Spouse so far off; is it no concern of yours to draw nigh to Him? Ah! if you would reach Him, follow Him without stopping, for in this course, he who stops goes back; he who gains not, loses.

Second Affection.

O self! I renounce thee, since I cannot follow my Jesus without doing so! O holy cross of my vocation! I embrace thee with all my soul, seeing it is with thee that I am to follow my Spouse! Divine spouse, Who only passeth by

the paths of a hidden, afflicted, suffering and despised life, enlarge my heart, that I may run after Thee in this happy way ! O religious souls ! if you turned away from all, if you wholly renounced yourselves, the fragrance of the Beloved, His holy example would allure you, and you would run after the odor of His divine perfumes !

Third Affection.

Ah ! how deplorable a thing it is to see so many slothful and lukewarm souls, who stop every moment in the road of their perfection ! O divine Master, Who hast called me because such has been Thy love towards me ; ah ! by Thy grace, make me follow Thee, not afar off, but step by step according to my power ! O religious soul ! leave the dead to bury the dead, but thou, who hast found thy Jesus, Who is thy life and thy way, follow Him !

MEDITATION XVII.

ON THE PRINCIPAL LESSONS THAT OUR SAVIOUR TEACHES
THE RELIGIOUS SOUL.

First Point.

CONSIDER that the meek Jesus coming into the world gave birth to the religious life, and the first lesson he gave to His beloved novices was : “ Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls ! ” My soul, cast Thyself at the feet of thy Spouse, listen to this divine lesson of meekness, humility, and peace ; retain it, engrave it in the depth of thy heart, and place it as the base and foundation of thy piety, of thy perfection and salvation.

Second Point.

Passing on to the perfections which this divine Master from heaven gives to His children, listen to what He says

to them, and to you also. "Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." O Lesson of innocence, of simplicity, of openness, of good faith, of holy artlessness, and of perfect submission! what, Lord, if we become not as these little children, we shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven? Ah! the great threat! we do not weigh its importance enough.

Third Point.

As a third precept, this good Director teaches that we must labor, pray without ceasing, and be fruitful in good works. You, My disciples, I have planted in My evangelical soil, but all those who shall not bear fruit therein shall be plucked up and cast into the fire. Abide in My presence, united with Me as the branch to its vine, to the end that you may bring forth fruits worthy of your calling, for My Father, Who is the heavenly vine-dresser, will cut off all the branches that bring forth no fruit. To thee, my soul, are all these words addressed. Weigh them in the scales of the sanctuary, and pass not lightly over them.

First Affection.

O my holy Founder! You, Who love us more with less of other virtues and more humility than with more of other virtues and less of humility; ah! come by your powerful intercession to aid my weakness! O Saint! truly humble of heart, help me for, in truth, pride and self-esteem have so closed the ears of my soul, that these holy lessons of humility and meekness have not yet penetrated to my interior. O meek Jesus! O humble Jesus! if we must learn of Thee these divine virtues, in what degree of perfection must we practice them! I see Thee everywhere meek and humble, in life, in conversation, in insults, in praises, in labors, and in death itself.

Second Affection.

Ah! my soul, wilt thou not take greatly to heart this holy, child-like simplicity, since the Holy Spirit dwells not in this world in double souls, and they shall

not dwell eternally in heaven. Depart from me, then, false prudence, human respect, reflections on creatures, and on myself. All these follies do not go on in the mind of an innocent child, given me for a portrait of simplicity. Ah! Lord, if I can have this dear virtue, Thou wilt take me lovingly in Thy divine arms, for simple souls are the children of love.

Third Affection.

Little will it profit me, O divine Sower! that Thou hast cast and planted me in the good ground of holy religion, if I bear not fruits worthy of eternal life. Thou wilt pluck me up, my divine Saviour. Ah! may this unhappiness never befall me! and for that end, may the grace of my vocation never be vain in me! May Thy divine presence be the dew and the sun making me produce the works of life and salvation!

MEDITATION XVIII.

BY WHAT MEANS THE RELIGIOUS SOUL WINS THE HEART
OF HER BELOVED.

First Point.

CONSIDER that God having gently won you away from the midst of worldlings, wills also that, by an humble exchange you should win from Him His divine heart by love. Alas! what way will you take? Listen, He, Himself, is your teacher. "My sister," says He, "Thou hast wounded My heart with one of Thy eyes, and with one hair of Thy neck." See that by the practice of heroic works and of great virtues, you carry away the heart of this Beloved, and that you do so by the practice of the small, lowly, and little virtues.

Second Point.

Consider that as in the human body there are but two eyes and very many hairs, your spouse displays incompara-

ble clemency, in that you can ravish His Heart by a single hair. Ah! at any moment, you can possess this divine Heart, for what else are the hairs but the little observances, those tiny ceremonies, those daily virtues which may be gathered at every turn? When you neglect to practice them, you are not considering that you are neglecting to win the Heart of God. "If thou wilt enter into life," said the meek Jesus, "keep the commandments."

Third Point.

Consider the account the saints have made of the practice of these little virtues. They have said, that he who neglects little things shall soon fall into greater; they have said that all the little monastic ordinances, and observances are the hedge that preserves religion, as the vineyard of the Lord, from wild beasts, and that whoever throws down this hedge shall be bitten by the infernal serpent. They have said, that such little observances are the habit of religion, which, but for that, would appear naked and without ornaments. In a word, our holy Founder has said that if he were in one of our monasteries he would be so exact in all those little practices, that he would thereby hope to win the Heart of God.

First Affection.

O sovereign goodness of this great God, how adorable Thou art! What king ever taught his vassals the way of entering into his secret chamber, that they might take from him his treasures! and yet, O God of goodness! Thou teachest me how I may steal Thy Heart and render it all mine. Alas! Lord, if it had only been the martyrs who could have won Thy Heart by giving their lives and their blood, what could we do? But those who are mortified have the same privilege. If it had only been the converters of nations, what could we do? But they who find their pleasure in speaking humbly and familiarly of Thee, who inspire hearts with good thoughts, have the same favor. If it had only been the conquerors of others, what

could we do? But the conquerors of themselves have the same happiness, blessed for ever be Thy sweet goodness!

Second Affection.

Ah! holy and little virtues, which like flowers grow at the foot of the cross of my Jesus, I will henceforth with a holy solicitude gather you that I may present you with reverence to this Spouse! But, my Jesus, preserve me from the reproach Thou didst make to the Pharisees, saying to them, that they did the small things and left the great undone. Grant me this grace, that I may do the one, and not omit the other. As Thou, my Lord, Who takest the little children into Thy arms by love and gentleness, and ceasest not to carry all sinners, as a great load on Thy shoulders, by mercy; grant that I may well observe silence, according to my obligation, and that devotion may prevent me from saying useless words; grant that I may obey my superiors exactly, and condescend willingly to my equals through love.

Third Affection.

O Religion, my holy mother! God grant that I may never rob Thee of Thy holy habits, nor break down the hedge that preserves thee! my God, with Thy grace, I will observe all, and at the end, confess humbly that I am a useless servant.

MEDITATION XIX.

ON THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOR.

First Point.

CONSIDER, that our Saviour, seeing the hour of His death draw near, gathered together all His disciples, to engrave in their hearts His last will and instructions. He said to them: "A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another, as I have loved you," and again, "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another."

Second Point.

Consider that our Saviour not only taught this love for our neighbor by words, but by His adorable example. Willing to die for the love of all, He gave Himself in the most Holy Sacrament to His Apostles, and even to Judas, whom He refused not to kiss, although His enemy. Ah! my Saviour, this example confounds me. Alas! scarcely am I willing to inconvenience myself ever so little, or to thwart my wishes for the love of my neighbor! Yet Thou dost teach me, that I must love in deed and truth, and not alone in word, and that shall I enter Thy heavenly temple only by the door of charity. Two keys open this door, the love of God and the love of our neighbor.

Third Point.

Consider that our Lord does not say : "Love some of your neighbors," but He takes in all. Therefore, you bear unworthily the title of religious if this love is not perfect in you; for, if you love not, and have no gratitude towards those who do you good, you are thankless; if you love not those who despise you, you are proud; if you love not those who afflict you, you are impatient; whereby you see, that without this holy charity for your neighbor, you are without virtue.

First Affection.

O Lord! alas! if Thy servants are only known by this holy mark of charity towards their neighbor, I have great reason to fear, I, who love myself so much, that I can hardly resolve to give up a little of my interests for the love of this dear neighbor. Still, O heavenly Master! Thou givest me Thy love for model. My soul, let us here see in the presence of our Lord, how we ought to love our neighbor after His example. Good Jesus, Thou hast taken upon Thee afflictions to gain for him repose, Thou hast taken upon Thee ignominy to gain for him glory. See here, my soul! what Thou must try to do. Ah! Lord, strip me of self-love, so that I may imitate Thee.

Second Affection.

It is from the depth of my soul, sweet Jesus, that I ask of Thee the favor, that Thou wilt give me grace always to put myself in my neighbor's place. May I never do to him aught but what I would have him do to me. Ah! Lord, if I look with an evil eye on those who offend me, Thou wilt in like manner withdraw from me Thy blessed looks; if I speak ill of my neighbor, Thou wilt be silent towards me, and say not a word to my soul; if I refuse him my services, Thou wilt withdraw from me Thy grace.

Third Affection.

God forbid that I should have any exceptions in love for my neighbor. Ah! Lord, Thou wilt give me Thy grace, and without regarding myself, I will love Thee in all my neighbors, and will never love any one but in Thee and for Thee. Depart from my soul, private friendships, depart particular affections. What! would you distract my heart with divers objects, and draw my mind away from its duty and its rule! But come into my heart, O sweet religious union and holy common life, for you the Lord blesses.

MEDITATION XX.

ON THE GARDEN OF OLIVES.

First Point.

CONSIDER the Lord of majesty withdrawn by night into this Garden of Olives. He becomes pale, sorrow seizes Him. "Ah!" says He, "my soul is sorrowful even unto death," and prostrating Himself on the ground in prayer, He says to His eternal Father: "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." And He repeated three times the same prayer, with such anguish and strength, that He began to sweat blood and water.

Second Point.

Consider what it is that could have brought these sorrows of death into the soul of Life. Doubtless it is love which has laid upon Him the sins of all men, and which would for the good of men make Him feel their effects and the fears of the inferior part. What sayest Thou, O my Jesus, that Thy soul is sorrowful even unto death? Alas! didst Thou not say to Thy disciples, that Thou hadst a great desire to be baptized with the Baptism of Thy Passion? Yes, Thou didst indeed say it, but, as St. Augustine, says having first created us by power and authority, Thou wilt redeem us by weakness and suffering.

Third Point.

Consider that the eternal Father heard His Son for His reverence, says St. Paul, and, as the Benjamin of His heart, He sent Him the cup of torments by one of His angelic servants. Then, the meek Jesus received this chalice with so great love, that He resolved to drink it to the last drop, and to leave therein neither insults, nor pains, nor outrages, nor sorrows that He did not undergo, and, therefore, He goes Himself to meet His enemies.

First Affection.

O Jesus! afflicted even unto death, now I indeed say to Thee: Eve tasted, in the garden, the sweetness of fruit; but love has made Thee, my Redeemer, taste there the bitterness of the penalty due to her vain pleasure. Ah! what great secrets are enclosed in this garden! Dear Spouse, when Thou art sad and in affliction, Thou withdrawest from Thy closest friends, and I, however little my trouble, run to creatures to seek some consolation. Thou turnest to Thy Father, but with such resignation and perseverance that Thou didst sweat blood, and I cannot watch even one hour with Thee, I become weary of prayer, I am only half resigned. Ah! may I learn in future Thy language: "Not my will, O my Father! but Thine be done."

Second Affection.

Ah ! Jesus, love stronger than death loaded Thee in this garden of Thy sorrows with all my sins, with all my infidelities, with the refusals I was to make of Thy grace, and in this way love, overwhelmed Thee on account of my wretchedness. My good Jesus ! if such apprehensions can be in Thy inferior part in face of death, what am I to think, criminal that I am, seeing Thee thus, King of innocence ! but as Thy death has obtained life for Thy children, so Thy weakness has obtained for them strength.

Third Affection.

O creatures ! prevent me not from drinking the chalice of afflictions that my heavenly Father sends me, for I will be conformed to my Jesus suffering. Take, my humble Jesus, take this chalice, which Thy Father sends Thee. Ah, my soul, what is it that the Father sends to His Son ? Is it consolation ? nay, is it not rather an increase of torments ? Is it not His consolation to do in all things the will of His Father ? That strengthens Him ; and instead of shunning them, He goes to meet His sorrows. O creatures ! whosoever ye be, hinder me not from taking the chalice my Father gives me !

MEDITATION XXI.

ON THE LOVE OF OUR SAVIOUR IN HIS SUFFERINGS.

First Point.

CONSIDER that the Eternal Father has so loved the world, that He has given to it His only Son ; and the Son has so loved the will of His Father, that, seeing Him desirous of saving human nature, without heeding the meanness and indignity of the thing, He willingly offered a prodigious price for its ransom : His Blood, His sweat, and His life.

Second Point.

Thus, this Saviour in His love does His Father's will and accomplishes the Redemption of the world. In each mystery of His Passion, He said : O my Father ! human nature, which we love, would be sufficiently redeemed by one of My tears ; but that would not suffice for the reverence I have for Thy will and for My own love. Over and above My anguish in the garden, I will to be scourged, to be crowned with thorns, to have My body all disfigured, to become like a leper, without form or beauty.

Third Point.

Thus the meek Jesus was scourged, crowned, condemned, mocked, and rejected in His quality of man, destined and dedicated to carry and bear reproaches and ignominies, in punishment due to sin. He has served as a general sacrifice for sin, having been made as one accursed, separated from, and abandoned by His eternal Father.

First Affection.

My soul, live from this day forth amid our Saviour's scourges and thorns, and there, like a nightingale on its thornbush, humbly sigh forth : hail to Thee, Jesus, Who wilt die that my soul may live ! Ah ! Eternal Father, what can the world render Thee for the gift Thou hast made it of Thine own Son ? Alas, to redeem so vile a creature as I am, He has given and delivered Himself up, and wretch that I am, I hesitate to give and abandon my nothingness to Him, Who has given me His all.

Second Affection.

Ah ! if I am a Spouse of Jesus crucified and suffering, I ought all my life-time to hold it a favor to wear His livery, namely, the nails, the thorns, and the lance. Remember, my soul, that the gall and the vinegar are the wine of His marriage feast ; seek not in this world sweetness and joys. Too great an honor is it, O King

of Glory, to drink with Thee the cup of sorrow ! May I, then, never refuse this draught ; for, O God ! says David, it is the drink of Thy beloved.

Third Affection.

O religious souls ! you, who have undertaken to follow Jesus Crucified, know that you are to be stripped of your own affections, as He was of His holy garment ! Ah, God, I deceive myself if I gather the myrrh of Thy mortifications with one hand, and the miserable pleasures of earth with the other. Keep me from this misfortune, my beloved Jesus, and make me follow Thee, even to glory by the way of sorrow.

MEDITATION XXII.

OUR SAVIOUR ON THE CROSS.

First Point

CONSIDER what St. Augustine says, “that Isaac was offered up in will where Jesus was crucified, and our Saviour’s cross was planted on the burial place of Adam,” it being most fitting, that the physician should be lifted up where the sick man lay, and that where pride had fallen the divine mercy should stoop. That the Blessed Saviour might let His Blood drop on the ashes of the original sinner, and that we might know that His sin was cleansed when it was nailed to the Cross, this Cross was planted on the sepulchre of him, who first sinned through disobedience.

Second Point.

Consider the divine Saviour raised and extended on this Cross, as on a glorious funeral-pile. Then it was that this great Pontiff offered to His Father the perfect sacrifice ; then did He dart His thoughts of love particularly on us. Ah ! My eternal Father, I take upon Me

and charge Myself with all the sins of this child, to suffer death, that she may be delivered from it; let me die, provided she live; let Me be crucified, provided she be glorified. O supreme love of the Heart of Jesus! what heart shall bless Thee devoutly enough?

Third Point.

See that while the Jews are around this Cross with hearts of iron and stone, the meek Jesus, as David says, was with a heart in His breast all melted with love. Like that wonderful bird which draws to itself the jaundice of man, and dies to cure him thereof, so our good Jesus, the sole bird of paradise, Who was never touched by the jaundice of sin, is, notwithstanding, fastened on the Cross, taking on Himself all the evil of man, His loved friend. He will die with willingness, in order to make this poor human nature live.

First Affection.

O God! I will say now, with St. Augustine, all indignant at the ingratitude of men: "Is it possible that man should know that Thou hast died for him, and that he should not live for Thee?" and with St. Francis: "Ah! Jesus, my sweet Jesus, Thou hast died of love, and no one thinks of it!" My dear Redeemer, never was Adam's misery so poisonous to destroy us, as Thy clemency was powerful to save us! O obedient Jesus! obedient even to the death of the Cross; ah! be also the repairer of all my acts of disobedience; let this Precious Blood be distilled into the deep wounds of my soul, for it is the medicine of my salvation!

Second Affection.

O free will of my heart! how good would it be for thee to be fastened on the cross of the divine Saviour, to die to self and be offered as a burnt-offering to the Lord! Never forget, O my soul! that our congregation is founded spiritually on the Mount of Calvary for the service of this crucified Lover, in imitation of Whom we must

crucify our senses, imaginations, aversions, passions and humors, for the love of the heavenly Father.

Third Affection.

O innocent Jesus! Who didst die for my iniquity, grant that I may live no more but for Thy goodness! Mystical serpent! charity has lifted Thee up. If I look not to Thee, my kind physician, I shall not deserve to be healed! ah! Lord, may, then, my eyes remain fixed on Thy sufferings, and my heart fastened on Thy goodness. Jesus, by Thy dear hands pierced with nails, grant me pardon of my evil works; by Thy pierced feet banish my errors!

MEDITATION XXIII.

ON THE FIRST FIVE WORDS OUR SAVIOUR SPOKE ON THE CROSS.

First Point.

CONSIDER that the gentle Jesus regarding His enemies around Him, said first: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." O what ardent charity! This Lord unable to excuse the sin of these wicked men, attributes it to their ignorance. And it was on this holy cross, with a heart so full of love for men, that, as soon as a thief had asked Him only to remember him, He made him a solemn promise of paradise. Ah! what a terrible thing is the fall of those who are in high callings!

Judas, an apostle, is lost in his proud malice; the thief humbles himself and is saved.

Second Point.

See St. John and the most holy Virgin at the feet of their Beloved, Who, regarding His mother in the extremity of sorrow, says to her: "Woman, behold thy son;" and to John: "Behold thy mother." O admirable Mother!

Ah! how well must thy heart have been accustomed to the language of love and its meaning! Thou sawest that He was giving thee for Mother to His Spouse, the Church, to whom, according to St. Augustine, He gave birth on the cross! O incomparable fact! No sooner had Jesus pronounced this third word, than the sun, as if touched with lively grief, withdrew its brightness, and darkness covered the earth.

Third Point.

Listen how, after three hours of silence, the meek Jesus cried out: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me." The inferior part was so abandoned, left destitute on every side, and surrounded with ills, that Jesus, to give us solace in our weaknesses, complained to His Father. Yet, to show that the superior part had no will but to endure these same griefs, He cried out: "I thirst." Leaving aside the bodily thirst, believe, my soul, that He had a holy and burning thirst for the salvation of those, who had a deadly and burning thirst for His destruction. O poor people! you say, let Jesus come down from the cross! ah! He is too good to do so. He thirsts too ardently for your salvation, which He will win by His death on the Cross.

First Affection.

O good and gentle Saviour! what tenderness of heart for my neighbor dost Thou teach me! Alas! must I even excuse those who crucify my Spouse! I will say, then, with the Apostle: "If they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory." But take care, my soul, that the unruly passions, which closed their eyes, shut not thine! ah! my Saviour, Thou didst excuse them, even in the act of sin, and scarcely can we forget a contradiction very long after having received it; scarcely can we look kindly on those who displease us ever so little.

Second Affection.

O most holy and constant Mother! receive John for thy Son, that is to say, receive the children of the Church as

thine. Henceforth, we shall be permitted to call thee Mother : ah ! Jesus, Thou wilt indeed die naked and destitute, giving Thy Mother to another, and not even willing to say to her this filial word, Mother.

Third Affection.

O meek Saviour ! it was not to act against holy indifference that Thou didst complain to Thy Father, but it was to console us in our ills, and to show us the true sufferings and anguish of Thy holy Soul, and that not only the sorrows of death, but the thirst of love parched Thee and gave Thee a holy thirst for our salvation. Alas ! am I not a thankless creature, if I complain in my slight desertions and afflictions, when I see the only Son of the Father thirsting to suffer more for my love ! if such a Father abandons such a Son, why will He not abandon a mean slave ?

MEDITATION XXIV.

ON THE MOST HOLY VIRGIN STANDING AT THE FOOT
OF THE CROSS.

First Point.

CONSIDER the most holy Virgin, constant with all constancy, at the foot of her Son's Cross. Ah ! what dost thou seek, O Mother of life ! in this place of Calvary and death ? Ah ! thou seekest not joy, but Thy dear child, and everywhere thy maternal heart makes thee wish to be united with this dear Son. Thus I see thee in the place of Calvary, taken, tied, fastened and bound to the divine Spouse.

Second Point.

Consider how love drew all the pains, torments, wounds and sufferings of our Redeemer into the heart of His most holy Mother. Alas ! the same nails which crucified the body of this divine Son, crucified also the Mother's

heart; the thorns of His crown pierced the soul of this meek Mother, so that she might indeed say with truth: "My beloved is to me a bundle of myrrh, but so loved, that He lies between my breast, that is to say, within my breast, and in the midst of my heart."

Third Point.

Consider the most holy Virgin as a mystical bee making her most excellent honey in the wounds of this Lion of the tribe of Juda, slain, rent, and torn in pieces on the Cross. O Child of the Cross! said she, let us glory in Thy admirable problem which the world understands not. O all ye who pass through this world, see how lovely is the death of my Son, because it is the supreme effect of His love! Ah! how necessary it is that my Jesus should die, that the whole human race should not perish.

First Affection.

Your holy Abbess, O religious souls! is not on the Mount of Thabor, but only on the Mount of Calvary, where she sees but reproach, powerlessness, spears, nails, and darkness. O most constant Mother of love! all the multitude of these waters of affliction have been powerless to extinguish thy charity. Alas! a tiny drop of affliction and contradiction makes me withdraw from my suffering Love.

Second Affection.

As thou wert, O holy Mother! the greatest vessel, the most capacious, the most worthy in the world, thou wert also more than any other filled with bitterness, and with the draught of anguish, which thy Beloved swallowed in this place of torment! Ah! what does that teach me, but to receive tribulation as a thing shared with the Spouse? O Mother most pure! thou callest us, saying: "Come, my daughters, let your hearts be vessels quite empty, and my Son shall pour into them the dew, wherewith His head is covered." And the drops of the night of His passion that are set as pearls around His head shall be changed into

pearls of consolation. My sweetest Mother, ah! do me the favor, that from this time forth I may receive all the little occasions of humiliation, of suffering, and of abjection, as tiny drops distilled from this precious head.

Third Affection.

O mystical bee! grant me the grace that, in the hive of my cloister and in the little cell of my heart, I may, after Thy example, lay up the honey gathered in these holy wounds of our Saviour! Depart from me, earthly taste; the gall of my king shall be to me sweeter than the honeycomb. Alas! O mother of sorrow and fountain of love! permit me no more to depart from the sacred foot of this adorable cross!

MEDITATION XXV.

ON THE DEATH OF OUR SAVIOUR ON THE CROSS.

First Point.

CONSIDER that it was on the cross, that the eternal Son gave the kiss of love to His heavenly Father in behalf of mankind. It was then, that the Father perceived a sweet smell rise up from the garments of His Son, that is to say, from His holy humanity. Ah! said He, behold the smell of my Son is as the smell of a plentiful field! Yes, for Jesus, flower of the field, being pressed under the wine-press of the cross, gave out a fragrance that gladdened God, enraptured the angels, and saved men.

Second Point.

Thus, our Saviour spoke the word: "All is consummated." The Redemption of the world is accomplished: nevertheless, Father, into Thy hands, I commend My spirit. I have already given up to Thee, my body, my sweat, my blood; there remains to me only the spirit that animates this body all torn: my Father, I commend it into Thy hands.

Do with it as it shall please Thee. Though all be accomplished, if it pleases Thee that it still remain in this body, or rather that I breathe it forth, my Father, I commend it into Thy hands.

Third Point.

Consider that the meek Jesus, seeing that His Father willed that He should die, death having no power at all to enter into Him, Who holds the keys of life and death, love opened the door to death, that it might enter to make a prey of this divine body: and Jesus having bowed His head to give the kiss of peace to His most holy Mother, and to His new born church, expired by an election of love. Then, O God! the sepulchres were opened, the earth quaked, and the veil of the temple was rent, all things rendering homage to Him, Who triumphed over death.

First Affection.

O Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews! Ah, how precious is the sweet and divine liquor that issues from Thy most holy body! alas! behold Thee all alone, no one aids Thee to turn this wine-press of exceeding weight! therefore, Thy holy body, divine vesture of Thy soul, is all reddened with its own blood, because Thou art at the day of Thy vintage. Ah! eternal Father, look in the face of Thy Christ, and have pity on His brethren! Meek Jesus, pressed, trodden on, and wounded on all sides, what confusion that I do not will mortification to begin its work in me! Nevertheless, I shall never shed the sweet liquor of virtue, but by this means. O religious souls! be ashamed to call yourselves members of Jesus Christ, if you will not suffer with Jesus Christ; for it is great lack of wisdom to see delicate and sensual members under a thorn-crowned head.

Second Affection.

O my dear Jesus! I know that torments, so grievous that they might have made a whole world die, were still not sufficient to make Thee die! It was necessary that Thou shouldst Thyself commend Thy Spirit into the hands

of Thy Father, all being consummated. Ah ! Thou teachest me here indeed the real essence of the spiritual life, by a perfect surrender of all into the hands of the heavenly Father ! Alas ! how I should suffer in pronouncing these holy words : Father, into Thy hands, I commend my spirit, do with me this or that, according to Thy will ! My superiors, I have accomplished your obedience, though laborious and abject ; but I give myself again into your hands, that if it please you, I may begin it again ! Happy were I, if I lived in this way.

Third Affection.

Bow Thy head, O my divine King ! call upon death to give me life ! Ah ! why fear death ? My Jesus has made this journey. Ah ! Jesus, God of my life, give me grace at the hour of my death to commend my spirit into Thy hands, for Thou art my true Father ! Melt with love and sorrow, O my soul ! at the sight of Jesus' death for thy sin ; come not down from this holy mountain, till thou hast buried this Spouse in Thy heart.

MEDITATION XXVI.

THAT THE JOY AND HAPPINESS OF THE DEVOUT SOUL IS IN
THE CROSS.

First Point.

SMITING my breast at the foot of the cross of my meek Jesus, I will say, "truly this was the Son of God." Now may it never be that I glory in myself, nor in the world, nor in anything. Let Jonas rejoice under the shade of his ivy, let Abraham entertain angels under the tree, let Ismael be succored under the wood of the desert ; let Elias be fed under the juniper-tree in the wilderness ; as for us, we desire no other joy nor shade than that of the cross, no other drink than the blood which trickles down it, no other food than the fruit of life hanging on the holy cross !

Second Point.

Consider how great and venerable is this Cross. Ah ! says David, adore the footstool of God ! And what shall we say of the Cross which has been the bed, the seat, and the throne of this same God ? Jacob adored the tip of Joseph's rod, and Esther kissed the tip of the rod of her spouse Assuerus ; ah ! then, with what reverence will the devout soul kiss the Cross, the true royal sceptre of her dear Jesus ! will she not say with David : " Oh, preach ye all, and say that the Lord reigns by the wood ? "

Third Point.

Consider how much the dearest friends of God have loved the Cross. The most holy Virgin, that sacred Sunamite, ascended every moment to this palm-tree to gather its fruits. St. Peter had no other strength, St. Paul no other glory, St. John no other refuge, and St. Andrew no other sweetness. As to our Blessed Father, he protested, that if he had known of a little bit of his heart which had not been marked with the Cross, he would have plucked it out.

First Affection.

O most holy Cross, honored by the members of my Saviour, ah, thou art the royal gate which leads to the temple of holiness, outside of which we shall find none ! O religious soul ! place your spirit deep down in the wounds suffered by the Lord on this Cross, and see that vile and vain is the heart that nestles on any other tree ! I salute thee, O holy Cross ! standard of salvation, palm-tree of life, sword wherewith the devil has been slain, medicine of immortality, defence of the present life, pledge of eternal life, sacred sign of Christians, trophy of King Jesus ! O dear and desirable Cross ! receive me into thy venerable arms.

Second Affection.

Ah ! Jesus, my Spouse ! by kissing and embracing Thy Cross, Thou didst kiss and embrace all our little crosses,

so as to make us love them more ! O my little crosses ! my little troubles, my little dislikes, humiliations, however small you may be, my Jesus has seen you, kissed you, and sanctified you ; how, then, should I not receive you with open heart ! All along the journey of this life, we find crosses at every step ; if my flesh shudders at them, still my heart adores them. Yes, I reverence you, little and great, interior and exterior, fleshy and spiritual crosses, unworthy as I am of the honor of your shadow !

Third Affection.

Alas ! whence comes this misery, that reverence for the cross has grown so cold ? In ancient times, devout persons and lovers of Jesus always made this sign of life with great veneration, when they ate, when they drank, when they rose up, when they sat down. "When thou goest out, when thou comest in, when lights are brought to thee, cover thyself with this breast-plate, and surround thy members with this sacred sign of the Cross, and no evil shall come near thee," says an old writer. O holy lover of the Cross ! ah, pray that after your example, I may love crucifixion of body and of heart ! O holy cross ! remain as a chain of love, and as a sure rampart on my breast.

MEDITATION XXVII.

ON OUR SAVIOUR'S RESURRECTION.

First Point.

CONSIDER that after a deluge of sorrow, of torments, and of anguish had gone over our Saviour, He rose from the tomb by His own power ; He came forth by His own might, and went very early in the morning to visit His holy Mother, beautiful, shining subtile, agile, and all glorious. O Mother most holy, rejoice ! Behold your dear Jesus more triumphant than ever ; behold this temple which the Jews had destroyed raised up again ; behold the sign of Jonas come to pass ; behold your dear Jesus alive !

Second Point.

Consider that there was, great joy in the ark of Noah, when the dove returned bringing the olive branch, as a sign that the water had abated, and that God had given the blessing of His peace. But, O God ! with what gladness was the company of the apostles ravished, when they saw once more among them the holy Humanity of our Saviour raised to life again, and glorious, carrying in His mouth the olive branch of a holy and acceptable peace. “*Pax vobis*,” said He ; ah ! this is the certain sign that the waters of the Father’s wrath had subsided ; this is the sign of the reconciliation of man with God.

Third Point.

Consider how needful it was that the kind Saviour should go and visit His disciples. Their faith, their hope, their charity were all wavering ; Magdalen was even going to seek Him to embalm Him. The disciples of Emmaus said : “ We hoped ; ” and the rest of the the company accounted the words of the holy woman as a dream. This is the reason why our good Saviour, fearing their peril, like a good Master, came to strengthen them. “ It is I, Myself, My dear disciples : see My hands, and My feet, and the wound in My side.”

First Affection.

O holy and faithful Virgin ! how sweet to thy maternal heart has been this happy news : thy Son is living ! O holy daughters of Sion ! wipe away your tears, behold your Beloved is come ! As you have drunk the cup of his sorrows, He will, therefore, give to you, as to His Benjamin, the first and the greatest part of His joy in glory ! My soul, revere in silence this triumphant Son of this consoled Mother.

Second Affection.

Ah ! my sweet Jesus, if all within me were recollected, and anxious for Thy coming, Thou wouldst do me the grace of bringing to me these sweet words : “ Peace be

with you !” O my heart ! if we had once received the peace of Jesus, ah ! the world would never be able to trouble us. Holy peace, sung by the angels at our Saviour’s birth, and given by Himself at His resurrection, ah ! be forever in my heart ! It is now, that I believe in earnest that my Redeemer liveth, and on the last day I shall rise out of the earth.

From this, I ought to draw the unvarying resolution : not to profane this body by evil. Nor will I flatter it, because it is to perish ; but I will preserve it, as it will rise again in glory. Since my eyes are to see the Saviour eternally, ah ! I will withdraw them from all useless and vain objects. Since I am to receive the kiss of the mouth of this glorious Bridegroom, I will not allow my lips to utter indevout discourses, irreligious or angry words, murmurings, excuses, or any other defect of my senses.

Third Affection.

Come, my Beloved, strengthen my faith, for it honors Thy Father, by resting upon His power ; my hope, for it is founded on Thy redemption ; my charity, because it embraces the goodness of the Holy Ghost. Ah ! dear Lover, what wilt Thou say showing Thy wounds, unless it be this : Have you need of strength ? See here My hands. Have you need of heart ? Behold Mine. Are you a little dove ? Behold the hole of the corner-stone, and rest therein. Ah ! Lord, I have need of all these ; and also I am sick and a captive, but I go to Thee and there I find my medicine and my redemption.

MEDITATION XXVIII.

ON THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD.

First Point

CONSIDER that the most holy Virgin, on the day of her Son’s Ascension, could not, doubtless, keep from saying to Him this verse from the canticle of love : “ Flee away,

my Beloved, and be like to the roe, and to the young hart upon the mountains of aromatical spices."

Second Point.

See all this holy assembly on the Mountain of Olives. The glorious Lord blesses them all; then, in the chariot of His own power and might, He ascends gloriously to heaven. Oh! said the holy Virgin, see how fair is my Beloved! Oh! how holy is this Cross, which He carries as a token of victory! It is of incorruptible wood; the Lord has crowned this Conqueror with the glory of His Resurrection and Ascension, and all the world shall be in rapture to praise Him.

Third Point.

Whilst this noble company kept their eyes fixed on the gracious Jesus, as He ascended on high a cloud removed Him from their sight. Still they ceased not to look, until some Angels, servants of their King, said to them: "Why stand ye looking up to heaven? This Jesus, Who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come as you have seen Him, going into heaven," to judge the living and the dead. Then, this holy company returns to Jerusalem, whilst the victorious Prince, Who led captivity captive, went and sat down at the right hand of His Father, and made His good servants be seated in the seats which Lucifer and his angels had left vacant. O God! what favor to men, what happiness to angels, what joy amid the heavenly Jerusalem!

First Affection.

O most holy Lover! Who invitest thy Beloved to depart, how stripped wert thou of all self-interest! The other daughters of Sion call Him with loud cries, and pray Him not to leave them. But thou, O only dove! thou seekest the glory of thy Son, and therein is thy joy and thy happiness! Yes, my Lord, flee away to the eternal hills, but turn on us every moment thy holy and gentle looks.

Second Affection.

Alas ! says St. Augustine, "O Lord ! how I sigh, at not having been present on this Mount of Olives, to kiss the marks of the nails, and water with the sweet tears of my joy the wounds of Thy precious body ! Ah ! my Jesus, I was absent, and even very far off, when Thou didst enter paradise. Thou didst bless Thy disciples, with Thy hands raised to heaven, and I was not there : the angels consoled them, and I heard nothing thereof. What shall I then do ? Whither shall I go to seek Thee ? No, there is no more joy in my heart ; my soul refuses to be comforted, except by Thee, O my ineffable sweetness." Let, then, my conversation be in heaven, where my Jesus is in His Glory.

Third Affection.

O angels of peace ! blame me not if I keep my eyes ever on high ; for where my Jesus is, there is my treasure. Still, you teach me that I must be prompt to do what the Beloved commands, when He sends His disciples back to Jerusalem, where they were ordered to go and wait for the Paraclete. O holy company delivered from Limbo, and placed by my Jesus in His glory, remember, after the example of Elias, to let your mantle fall on your servant ; let the mantle of faith and the veil of hope fall on my poor soul, for you have need but of the robe of charity !

MEDITATION XXIX.

ON THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY GHOST.

First Point.

DEVOUT souls, enter humbly the upper chamber, where the glorious Virgin, the holy Apostles, the blessed disciples, and the holy women are all assembled in prayer, in repose, in faith, in hope, waiting for their good Master to accomplish His promise, and clothe them all with the

power from on high. In like manner retire apart from all, to receive this perfect gift from the Father of lights : for God will never display His marvels in you, if He find you not in a holy interior retreat, having nothing to do with worldlings. See you not that all this company is in Jerusalem, but apart and withdrawn, and as in a desert?

Second Point.

Ten days after our Saviour had ascended on high, and His beloved disciples had been prepared by silence, brotherly intercourse, and prayer, there came a sound from heaven as of a mighty wind blowing, which filled all the house where they were seated, and there appeared to them as it were tongues of fire, which sat upon each of them. Ah ! this is the day when God gives His gifts ; we must only wait to receive.

Third Point.

Consider how much the Eternal Father has loved the holy Church, since He has enriched her with His own treasures. Not content with having given her His Son and His image, He gives her also His Holy Spirit, in order that just as the Holy Ghost overshadowed the holy Virgin, of whose pure blood Jesus was to be born, that He might be the Father of the Church, so the Holy Ghost descended to set on fire this holy Church, which was newly born of the blood of Jesus Christ.

First Affection.

Ah ! who will give me the grace to keep myself in interior repose, far from all the distractions of the world, that I may, in silence, wait for the coming of the Holy Ghost ! O most holy Virgin ! O glorious Apostles ! obtain for me a share in your devotion, so that I may persevere in prayer ; that if the Lord should tarry in coming, I may bear this delay. I know, O my God ! that Thou wilt not leave me an orphan, but that if I persevere in obeying Thee, Thou wilt send me the Spirit of Truth.

Second Affection.

Come, Holy Ghost, enkindle in our hearts the fire of Thy love: come, Father of the poor, come, Giver of gifts, Light of hearts. Ah! gentle Jesus! when Thou wouldst begin to publish Thy law, Thou didst send on Thy disciples many tongues of fire, thereby plainly showing that the preaching of the Gospel was designed to set all hearts on fire with celestial love. Ah! Holy Spirit! in bringing so many fires on earth, what wilt Thou, but that they burn? I entreat Thee, once more, fill my heart with the fire of Thy charity, with that charity, which suffers all things, which believes all things, which dealeth not perversely!

Third Affection.

O holy Church of the living God! how rich Thou art! the Holy Ghost fills all the blessed laborers, He changes them all into fire, into love, and into zeal. They are all inebriated with the wine of the Spouse, and so disgusted with earthly things, that they account themselves, thenceforth, happy to be in afflictions, persecutions, and in a state of death for their dear Jesus. O holy Spirit! if I received Thee without resistance, doubtless I should experience within me striking effects; I should speak only of the marvels of God; I should seek only his glory and my own contempt; I should esteem myself happy in suffering reproaches for the name of the Lord.

MEDITATION XXX.

ON THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

First Point.

CONSIDER that heaven and earth are full of the majesty of God, Who is all and everywhere, by essence, presence, and power. Ah! how we fall into forgetfulness of a truth so infallible and so sweet! Ah! said Moses, in

order to encourage his people, there is no other nation so great, that hath gods so nigh them, as our God is present to all our petitions.

Second Point.

Consider, that attention to the divine presence is an eminent means of advancing to perfection. Therefore, it was one of the first precepts, that God gave to His servant, Abraham: "Walk before Me, and be perfect." Ah! Lord, what else hast Thou said to me by placing me in this holy monastery, but: "My daughter, walk always in My presence, and thou shalt arrive at perfection: think on Me in all thy ways, and I will direct thy steps?"

Third Point.

Consider into what abuse and wretchedness the soul falls that becomes forgetful of this divine presence. The two old men of Babylon turned aside their eyes from heaven, that they might not be reminded of their sins. You are mad, says David, if you say: "The Lord shall not see: neither shall the God of Jacob understand;" for His eyes are open all over the face of the earth. He sees and contemplates all that is done therein; He fathoms the hearts, He foresees thoughts; nothing escapes Him, His eye observes all.

First Affection.

O my sweet Jesus, my Lord and my God! I know that if I go up to heaven, Thou art there; if I go down into hell, I find Thee there; if my spirit flies to the uttermost parts of the sea, and if it goes down into the depths, there I meet Thee. Ah! why, then, shall I not serve Thee everywhere, why shall I not pray to Thee in every place, since in every place, my Beloved, Thou hearest me? O sovereign King! how happy are they that are Thine! Thou givest them audience at all hours; oh! that I may have the grace, in all things and in all places, to forget myself by continually remembering Thee, Who art more present to me than I am to myself! The farther I go away from myself, the nearer do I draw to Thee.

Second Affection.

Alas ! what disorder is this ? I am called to walk before the Lord and be perfect, and I do the very contrary, walk after my appetites, and pursue my own will and self-love ; thus, I bring to naught all perfection. Ah ! my soul, we must, henceforth, in all our actions regard Him Who sitteth at the right hand of the Father, absent to our senses, but present to the heart wherein it is His will to reign, as well as in heaven !

Third Affection.

O thankless and foolish Spouse, dare you indeed turn away wilfully from your Beloved, to taste the pitiful pleasures of earth ? Ah ! it is in His presence, and in His very sight that you are wanting in fidelity ; nothing can be hidden from this all-seeing Eye. O God ! Who fathomest the hearts, may all my thoughts and my desires be directed to thee !

MEDITATION XXXI.

ON THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD.

First Point.

CONSIDER that the love God bears us is so great, that He employs His wisdom, His power and His goodness to lead us to our end by means which are most suitable and proportioned to us, and His divine Providence watches, not only over the most important things which concern us and our salvation, but over all the smallest things of our lives. Not a hair of our head falls without His Providence ; He even knows their number, and neither men nor devils would dare to touch one of them without His order.

Second Point.

Consider that the Holy scripture tells us that this divine Providence does all things for us with weight, number, and measure ; now see what an obligation you have to abandon

the care of yourself. Let us then never look at the things which happen us, good or evil, in themselves ; for either they would puff us up, or they would trouble us and overwhelm us with tribulations. But let us see in all, the Providence of our good God, Who, with incomprehensible love, employs all His wisdom, power and goodness in the guidance of so tiny a creature, to make it attain to its happy end.

Third Point.

See how much God feels offended when we take ourselves out of the hands of His sweet Providence, being minded to guide ourselves according to our fancy. Oh ! how ill he took it in the children of Israel, that they had committed this fault ; for, departing from His gentle Providence, they would have a king to lead them, and were made miserable.

First Affection.

O Eternal Father ! Thy Providence governs all things, and truly, it is a strange thing, that when we are daughters of such a Father, Who watches over us With such a wakeful eye, we can have any other anxiety than to love and serve Him ! Ah ! said our holy Founder, my soul has no other appointment but to meet this holy Providence of God.

O my God ! Thou hast taught me from my youth upwards, and I will ever make known Thy wonders !

Second Affection.

O supreme Wisdom, Power, and Goodness ! I adore You, You, Who take such loving care of all the moments of my life. O religious souls ! our true morrow is Divine Providence. Consider the lilies of the field, they neither sow nor spin, and the Divine Providence of the heavenly Father clothes them better than Solomon in all his glory. Ah ! my God, how I wish, henceforth, to hold in great honor whatever shall happen to me ! No, I will never say that I have too many afflictions, mortifications, and pains, for Thou hast weighed them, and the strength Thou wilt give me. Neither will I say that they are too long, for Thou hast taken their measure.

Third Affection.

Therefore, my Lord, I will trouble myself no more, but let myself be guided by Thee. The shepherd who guides me is the Lord all-powerful ; nothing shall ever be lacking to me. No, never will I interfere with myself, I will leave the care thereof to Him. Let Him choose the place of my abode, my employment, my consolation, my pains, my health, my sickness, my death, my salvation. I will only rely on following His guidance and on leaving Him absolute Master.

MEDITATION XXXII.

ON THE WILL OF GOD.

First Point.

CONSIDER that our sanctification being in the will of God, we must not doubt that all our perfection and all our good are in the same will. Ah ! how happy and peaceful will be the heart, which, by holy love and entire submission, shall experience in all things that the divine will is good, pleasant and perfect !

Second Point.

Consider that this will of God is the sovereign queen of the universe. Nothing is done but in obedience to it ; it orders everything, except sin. and we should make it a duty to see everything contained in this divine will, without the existence or possibility of any other cause. Oh ! how happy would religious souls be if they regarded all in this blessed origin, and if they received all as coming from this holy will. In all it ought to seem to us that we hear these words of Habacuc to the prophet Daniel : “ Take what God hath sent thee.”

Third Affection.

Consider that the eternal Son of God came to teach

us the submission and reverence due to the supreme will, in that He says He came not to do His own will, but that of His Father. He also teaches us this same submission and reverence. "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me, but yet not My will but Thine be done." Again, this divine Master teaches us to ask daily that the will of God may be done on earth as it is in heaven; and in fine, He concludes the course of His mortal life, by the giving up by His resignation of Himself to the will of His eternal Father: "Father, into Thy hands, I commend my spirit."

First Affection.

O most holy and divine will of my God! since the character and infallible mark of the true daughters of my holy Congregation is to see thee and to follow thee in all things, I will in earnest undertake this holy exercise. But, O holy will! how shall I know thee, so as to follow thee? for it is extremely good for me to adhere to thee. O Jesus, I see Thy wishes in Thy commandments. If I keep them I shall be loved by Thee and Thy Father. I know Thy will in my rules, my vows and observances, and, therefore, I will observe them carefully; for it is said: "Pay thy vows to the Most High." I know it by the voice of my superiors; for it is written: "Let every soul be subject to higher powers!" and again: "he that heareth you heareth Me." I shall know it by the just wishes of my neighbor: "As you would that man should do to you, do you also to them in like manner." In a word, as I see this divine will in all, I will honor it, with the help of grace, and will follow it in all things.

Second Affection.

Ah self-will! it is time to die to yourself, for I will no more live but in the will of my God; this, I will follow as my princess and mistress. Let it be written in large letters at the commencement of the book of my soul. My own judgment, it is not your business any more to discern. discuss, see; it is enough for you to submit to follow the

disposal of your God. O my God! lead me as Thou wilt, make me pass through cold, heat, light, darkness, through employment, through repose. Though Thou wert to bring me to the very gates of death, I will not fear under Thy guidance.

Third Affection.

Yes, my heavenly Father, Thy will be done on earth, where consolations are rare and toils innumerable. Take for daily practice, O my soul! when anything shall put you out, to say: not my will, but that of my God be accomplished.

MEDITATION XXXIII.

ON PRIVATIONS.—CONCLUSION OF THE RETREAT.

First Point.

CONSIDER what grace God has given you in this retreat, in having sent you many motions and lights for your good, which are all to end in the single point of the total putting off of yourself, so that you may be able henceforward to say effectually and in truth: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away, blessed be His holy name."

Second Point.

Consider the happy state into which this true privation of all things puts the soul, namely, that she wishes for her Jesus alone. It is the glory of this Sunamite, that she can be alone with her King, and say: "My beloved to me, and I to Him." In this way we keep our affections so naked, and so simply united to God, that nothing attaches itself to us, and we attach ourselves to nothing.

Third Point.

Consider what wrong you will do your soul, if you clothe it with anything whatsoever; because if our Lord found

you in the lovely and holy nakedness of the children of God, He would take you into His arms, as He took St. Martial, to carry you to the highest perfection of His love. Blessed, therefore, are they who are stripped of all things, for our Lord will clothe them again, and will clothe them with Himself.

First Affection.

O Lord, behold a poor, wretched and tiny creature before the throne of Thy divine mercy, entreating Thy sole goodness to accept its small, but great renunciations. Tear away boldly everything which clothes my heart! O Lord, I except nothing, tear off myself from myself: yes, self of mine, I take leave of you for ever, I will never take you back again, if my Lord give me not an express command. O desires! O affections! O creatures! O all things! I strip myself entirely of you.

Second Affection.

O sweetest Jesus! Who didst come naked into the world, and didst die naked on the cross, what lesson hast Thou given me, unless to live stripped of all things, and to sing without ceasing in heart and in works: Hail Jesus, destitute of father and mother on the cross, hail Thou most holy destitution; hail Mary deprived of Thy son at the foot of the cross, hail Thou most holy destitution! Yes, Lord Jesus, may my heart remain unclothed of all, even of the most spiritual goods, that Thou mayest be solely and simply all things to my heart!

Third Affection.

Therefore, my soul, go, henceforth, like another Isaias, through the way of this world stripped of everything, and as soon as you feel your heart wish to put on any garment whatsoever, throw it at the feet of Jesus, and there renew the general and particular resolutions of your retreat, to the end that being only clothed with Jesus Christ, you may live, henceforth, in newness of life. *Amen.*

D. S. B.

SELECTIONS

FROM THE

CONFERENCES

OF

SAINT JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL.

FIRST DAY.

CONFERENCE LI.

On Retreat and the Annual Confession.

THE Sisters should enter upon the exercises of the Retreat less for the enjoyment of spiritual sweetness than for confusion, on account of their past faults and negligences, and that they may gain new strength to advance in the way of our Lord.

On the eve, of the day, on which they are to enter retreat, they should think most seriously of making it, as if for the last time. Among all the counsels proper for the Sisters, that of making the exercises without any hurry or effort of mind is one of the most useful. Let them, therefore, prepare themselves with great peace and tranquillity, to receive the lights and movements of God, and learn what He will have of them, for on that depends all their happiness, and not on an effort of mind.

I do not say, that there is no need of working, but let it be simply and quietly. We must not trouble ourselves to get rid of all our imperfections, so much as to acquire and establish in our heart solid virtues, profound humility, respect for God's presence, etc. We must not put ourselves out very much about confession; but make our examination very quietly, after having invoked God and asked for His grace. For myself, I always follow the method of our Blessed Father: to see how I have behaved towards God, towards myself, and towards my neighbor. First, towards God: I examine myself on the vows and spiritual exercises, then on the office; for that regards God principally. Secondly, towards myself: on my impatience and want of condescension, for it is I who do these things; as also, on the little submission I have shown to divine Providence, when it ordains, or permits events which are contrary to my inclinations, or my own judgment. Thirdly, towards my neighbor: if I have served and relieved him, when I could and ought, and again, if I have not borne with him in his moods contrary to mine.

To make a good confession, we have only to place our conscience before God, with humility, sincerity and a firm purpose of amendment, and with contrition for our sins. Then our conscience comes before us, like a book, to show us all we have done. As for knowing whether our heart is bitter against any one, we must give heed, if we have the will to hurt him; for bitterness is not a sin in itself, even though I may feel my heart quite full, and my blood boiling with anger. If, in spite of that, I make an act of virtue in regard of the person; or, if feeling sorry for some good which has happened to him, or glad of some ill, I make an act contrary to my feeling, I must remain in peace.

But I know well whence this bitterness comes: from our not being willing to lay up in our heart the love of contempt and dishonor. The least word humiliates us; our hearts are embittered which would not be if we loved contempt. If we were upright and sincere, I mean virtue-loving, and were not vain and proud, involuntary faults of frailty would do us no great harm; for those faults we commit from hastiness are not very hurtful, provided that we faithfully humble ourselves for them.

Another time the Saint said to the Sisters who were going into Retreat.

Sisters seek God in the simplicity of your hearts, with humility and truth, and not yourselves, nor your own satisfaction, for it is thus He wills to be sought. The Prophet said: 'Do good and hope in God:' so that, my very dear sisters, we must do good, to be able to hope for good. This point of doing good and rendering our obligations to God, must needs go before, otherwise, our hope is without foundation; for God, Who has indeed made us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves. All the saints, and those who have made and who make profession of perfection, are, indeed very much in earnest, because they know that God will be served earnestly. But we, poor creatures that we are, easily throw ourselves into outward things, and amuse ourselves in trifles, there where we ought to see the sole will of God.

O! how happy would a soul be, that undertook indeed to look to and follow in all things this divine will! It would enjoy a profound peace in its resignation, because in everything it would find this divine will, and would love it. God give us this grace. *Amen.*

SECOND DAY.

CONFERENCE LII.

On the principal fruit the Retreat ought to produce, namely, to make us perform our spiritual exercises with greater attention to God.

OH! how sweet is the life wherein we have only to speak to God, and to keep near Him! We ought to profit greatly by the grace given us in religion, where a certain time, and number of days are appointed us, during which we have nothing to do but to think of this supreme goodness and of ourselves.

What you ought principally to try to bring away from your retreat, my dear Daughters, is to do all your actions, particularly your spiritual exercises, with great attention to God, and to engrave deeply in your minds, that in whatever place you may be, God sees you much better than I see my hand, now while I am looking at it. He sees and pierces all which is at the bottom of the creature's heart, even to the least thought; He know sit much better than it can know itself. If we indeed engraved these truths of faith in our hearts and minds, it would help us greatly to do our actions well, in great fear and abasement of ourselves, before this high Majesty.

If any one speaking to a great Lord, is very careful to do so with respect, how much more, when we speak to God, ought we to keep ourselves in profound reverence, particularly at the divine Office, and when we say vocal prayers! How many times do we say them with the mouth, our hearts being far away from what we are saying, especially the prayers, which are all, or nearly all, ad-

dressed to the eternal Father, of Whom we ask graces and favors, by the merits of His Son, or through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin? How do we say the antiphons and hymns, which are all so worthy of respect, and especially the *Pater*, *Ave* and *Credo*, which are the most beautiful prayers we can make? Our Lord has commanded us to say the *Pater*, and has Himself taught us the way to pray, when He said to His Apostles: "When thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to Thy Father in secret, and Thy Father, Who seeth in secret, will repay Thee."

That shows us how we are to retire within our hearts. In other places He says: "Do not as the hypocrites, who with their mouth make long prayers, but their hearts are far from Me; but enter into thy closet, and when thou dost pray to Thy heavenly Father, say: Our Father, Who art in heaven, etc."

In a word, my dear Sisters, we must be very careful to bear a holy reverence to the Almighty, Who is present, especially at the beginning of our prayers and meditations. To put ourselves in this divine presence, and to fathom this truth; that it is God to Whom we are speaking, and Who sees us; this is the art of arts. Indeed, my dear daughters, we must do like that good knight, who, not knowing when death might take him, expected it everywhere, that it might find him always ready. You see, we must expect it everywhere, and get ready for it by a lively attention to this Omnipresence. It is related in so many different places of Holy Scripture, that our Lord said: "Blessed is that servant, whom, when his Lord shall come, he shall find so doing." And in other places: "Watch ye therefore, because you know not at what hour your Lord will come." Sometimes, He will come at the morning hour, sometimes, at noon, sometimes, in the evening.

I know not the meaning of these hours; but I think they are to make us feel that we must be ready everywhere, because we know not the hour when we shall die, but only the certainty that we must die.

THIRD DAY.

CONFERENCE LXIII.

On the Necessity and the Advantages of Exterior and Interior Self-Abasement.

My dear Daughters, since you wish it, I will say a few words to you about self-abasement, and with reason, since we are now drawing near the end of the year.

Our Blessed Father has wisely instituted that there should be changes, to show us that we must strip ourselves not only of exterior but also of interior things. It is unworthy of a religious soul to become attached to anything but God, or to place her affections elsewhere.

It is no great matter, it would seem, to be a little attached to pictures, to a rosary, to a cross, to a cell, to a charge. Nevertheless, we must not be so, for that would be an obstacle to our perfection, and we would be acting contrary to the perfection of our vow of holy poverty, and against the spirit of our Institute, which shows us clearly that we may not even attach ourselves to those things which are given for our use, since it is ordered that these shall be changed amongst us. But, to be attached to our own will, to our judgment and our opinion, to our own esteem, to our interests and satisfactions, and to wish to be loved, oh ! how much more dangerous and hurtful to our advancement is this, and how much more difficult to discover and uproot !

Now, I wish to give you only two practices of despoilation, that your mind may not be over burdened ; these are humility and meekness. We must despoil ourselves of vanity, and of the good opinion we have of ourselves.

Oh ! what reason we have to abase ourselves, to hold ourselves in low esteem, and to have no self-complacency. Let us then keep ourselves little and low in the eyes of our Lord, of creatures, and of ourselves ; for in fact, we abase and humble ourselves so little, that it is pitiable ! We have too good an opinion of ourselves, for which reason, let us learn to know ourselves, and hold our-

selves simply for what we are. Otherwise our affairs will not succeed, and we will not possess the spirit of the Institute. Let us then be such, I entreat you, my dear Sisters, that only humility may be seen to breathe in our words, in our actions and behavior, and that this virtue may become more conspicuous in us.

Meekness, according to our Blessed Father's idea will make us despoil ourselves of our inclinations and passions, and will render us gracious towards our neighbor, and tranquil in ourselves, not fretting over our imperfections, not giving way to any dryness and hardness of heart, whatever may befall us. I wish you this cordiality and this gentleness.

If our holy Founder had not made it, the subject of a conference I would speak of it at greater length, so great is my desire to see it reign among us. True sweetness and affection is nothing else than a love of the heart which makes us take to ourselves, by compassion, all the trials, sufferings, and defects of our sisters, to suffer with them in heart. This affection ought to be so great between us, that if a sister asked us for a piece of our heart, we would give to her, if it were in our power.

Oh! how very far are we from having such feelings, for we do not even give them freely and graciously a chafing dish, a saucepan, a basket, a handkerchief or the like; and yet the sister has as much right as we have, to what she asks us to lend her.

Now, I know well, that as long as we live, we shall continually commit failings, nor am I astonished thereat. But by always committing the same, we show that we are not working with sufficient fidelity at growing better. For, as soon as we become aware of certain imperfections in us, we ought so to bend our efforts on that side, that we may free ourselves of them, because when these imperfections are corrected, others will spring up, and thus we have work enough, and our Lord is wont to leave us this, to keep us in humility. But, let us take great courage, and when we have committed certain faults, let us not be afraid to kneel down, to ask pardon of the sister towards whom we have failed, and we shall sufficiently repair our fault before God and before creatures. And, I entreat you,

let this practice never be neglected, for it ought to be particularly esteemed by us, since it has been advised and recommended to us by our blessed Father.

One of the most sensible griefs which can effect our heart at the hour of death is the thought that we have not lived well, nor profited by the admonitions and corrections which have been given us, nor by the instructions we have received. Yes, we shall have many a regret at that moment, and I can assure you that this will be one of the most poignant, for we shall see, indeed, that it will have been the cause of the little advancement we have made. Now, let us, therefore, take heed to ourselves, and do good while we have time. We owe this to God and to our perfection, striving to render our souls pure and well-pleasing to His divine majesty. We are strictly obliged to this by the duty of our vocation, as also to increase the accidental glory of our blessed Father. As for me, I am not worthy to be considered; but still I know that the filial love you bear me, my dear daughters, leads you to desire my consolations.

And, indeed, I have no greater in this world, than to see my sisters doing their duty and going on to perfection. And, in like manner, my greatest affliction would be to see any of them indifferent and neglectful, and not laboring for their advancement; so that what afflicts me or comforts me in this world is the good or evil of our sisters, for the maternal love I bear them makes me desire their happiness and spiritual profit. As for me, I am the most faulty of all; but, thanks to God, I sin not of deliberate purpose. I hope that if you pray much for me I shall rise above my wretchedness, and shall do my duty much better for the future. I know that you all do the same, and that not with reflection. Let us pray much for each other; not only for those with whom we live, but also for all those of the Institute, for it is my ardent wish that all our monasteries should have but one heart and one soul in God.

FOURTH DAY.

CONFERENCE III.

On the Qualities of True Zeal, and on the Foundation of Solid Virtue.

My dear sisters, I am very glad that you ask me this question; how are the professed sisters to be zealous in obtaining and holding the spirit of their vocation, and how are they to serve as good examples? I answer you, by assuring you, that it is a very important question. The sisters are most certainly to foster in their hearts an ardent zeal to edify each other, and all those with whom they live, and they are to be most careful to drink in the spirit of their Institute, to work that those who follow them may also imbibe of it. But this zeal is not to be punctilious, importunate, or impatient; even those in charge must not be too hard upon them. The zeal of our Blessed Father was not of this kind. It was a zeal which made Him pray, give good example, incite, encourage, and bear with souls. He did not hurry them, but waited long for them with admirable patience and gentleness. He helped them with all his power, not grudging his trouble, not sparing his charity, and leaving all to God's Providence. We must not go in search of other doctrines than that of the blessed Father of our souls in order to exercise our zeal. This, then, is what we must do: we must have recourse to prayer, help, support, and give good example to our Sisters; those who are in charge, by their advice and instructions, and the others by their conversation, and by encouraging each other.

In what, sisters! in what are we to take pleasure, if not in speaking of God, of eternity, of the happiness of our vocation, of the love and fidelity we are to have for the spirit of our holy Institute, and in carefully preserving it. Our conversation ought not to be of aught else. When we have permission to converse together in private, let us be of great observance. Let us try to give good example. We cannot tell the good which a really edifying person does in a religious house. But let all that we do

for edification, be done with the sole desire of pleasing God, and for the sole motive of His love ; and let that love alone animate our zeal.

Now, my dear daughters, I must give you three foundations upon which to establish our zeal and virtue, that it may be solid. The first is to be wholly dependent on the fatherly care of our good God and of our superiors, without having any care for ourselves. No, think not of what you shall do, and of what shall happen to you ; give up all your soul, your mind, your body, and even the care of your perfection, into the hands of divine Providence, and of obedience. For our Lord will have care enough, and He has more love and care for us than the fondest Mother has to nourish and bring up her child. Yes, certainly, my dear sisters, God thinks more in detail of our necessities, however small and trifling, has more care for them than a tender mother and nurse for her little one whom she dearly loves. Know, therefore, that the measure of God's Providence over us, is the measure of the confidence we have in Him, and that His care is so much the more complete, as our self-surrender into His holy hands is more perfect and entire. I wish not that you should grow weary in laboring faithfully for your perfection. But I tell you only, that the ways and means of reaching it are to be indifferent to you. Let yourselves, therefore, be turned, moulded, and fashioned wholly according to the eternal good pleasure, by the way to obedience, not permitting your mind to discern what is proper for you or not, nor to think : " shall I, indeed, be able to take this charge ? " nor, " I could do the other better ; I should get on better with this sister who has more affinity with my turn of mind, than with that one. "

Let all these distractions alone, in order to give yourself up unceasingly to the guidance of Our Lord.

The second point is, that we must seek God alone, wish for God alone, tend to God alone. Ah ! if you only seek God, you will find Him everywhere. For example, one of you is going to her prayer, obedience takes her off immediately to some other employment : without fail, she will find God as much in this occupation, as in her prayers. I grant you, that, perhaps, it will be with less satisfaction and sweet repose ; but know that God is found better, where

there is more self-denial than pleasure for us. If you seek only God, sisters, you will be indifferent about your employments, your charges, your abode, and all that concerns you, inasmuch as you will find everywhere, the good and great God of your heart, since He is never better found than in obedience. It is in this divine indifference that we find inclosed the teaching of our blessed Father. "Ask for nothing, and refuse nothing:" this is the last injunction he gave us. It contains all the rest together, since, by practising it, we find humility, meekness, simplicity and mortification perfectly combined. But, more than all virtues, this teaching contains furthur, perfect dependance on God's good pleasure, and the complete perfection contained in our holy Rules and Constitutions. The Saint wished us to be faithful to this practice; and this, too, is my sole desire for you, my dear daughters. As I know that there is nothing more perfect than this very practice, I honor and prize it immensely, remembering the zeal with which our blessed Father specially recommended it to us, three years before his death, when he had so frequently in his mouth, these words: "Ask for nothing, and refuse nothing, my daughters." Oh! what great tranquillity they have, who practice well this teaching, because it leads promptly and without fail to the highest and most sublime perfection.

You ask, must not we then ask for what we require? Pardon me, sisters, you must ask simply, and with confidence, for what you are in need of. The Constitution orders this; but you must take care, only to ask for what is necessary and not for what is pleasant, which we could not have had even in the world; nor must we wish, just at our own time, whatever we fancy, being unwilling to suffer at all. No, my dear daughters, we must be more mortified. A religious soul should have a supreme love for sufferings, and for practising her vow of poverty. For example, when we begin to feel a little cold, we immediately wish for blankets and clothing. Heat comes, and we want at once, to throw aside everything sooner than the others. This evinces great tenderness and thought for ourselves, which makes me sometimes, somewhat sick at heart, for I see my daughters are not so perfect as I would have them. I

will tell you, moreover, that this teaching of our blessed Father aimed especially at overcoming any excessive care for our bodies. He knew that women are generally very soft, and imagine that everything hurts them, everything inconveniences them, everything injures their health, that this thing is proper for them, and that not so ; I am better here than there ; this air is good for me, the other hurts me ; and a thousand other little foibles, which a soul with holy generosity and attention to God is without. But, do you know what was the special aim of this last counsel of our Blessed Father : “ Ask for nothing, and refuse nothing ? ” It was to deliver and free our minds from so many thoughts, from so many reflections and designs, which souls not as yet divested of themselves still have, causing them great troubles and disquietude. If we employ such persons for charges or for foundations, they will worry about the contradictions, the little vexations and difficulties, and the privation of their little comforts which will upset them. “ O dear me ! ” they will say, “ I am so distracted, so anxious, I cannot keep myself in the presence of God ! When I was at Annecy, in our little cell there, I was so happy, so recollected, our Mother was so gentle and kind to me ; my sisters were all so cordial, kind, and condescending ! I agreed so well with their dispositions, they loved me so tenderly ! ” . . . All that is not virtue, and it is not to be virtuous to be cordial and meek when nothing puts you out, and when you are in your cell without being tried and have nothing to cause you sufferings, and when you are with a superior and sisters, who approve of all you do ; equability and holy joy are not marvellous in these occasions. I greatly fear, on the contrary, that our passions thrive amid such repose and quietness, and that you are full of yourselves, unmortified, attached to your own interests and satisfactions. If you look well at yourselves, you will find that your pretended virtue, is not in you, but in your superior, in your sisters, in your cell, and in the places where you are. If we seek God only, we shall find Him here, we shall find Him there ; and, because He is everywhere, in all places, and in all persons, if we wish Him alone, we shall be content with all things and everywhere.

The third way to firmly establish our virtue is to receive all things as coming from the hand of God, Who sends us all for our good and to make us gain merit. One sister says a sharp word to you; another gives you an unkind answer; see in these things the goodness of our Lord, because, though He is not the author of the sister's imperfection, He has, nevertheless, permitted this word to be said to you, to the end that you should profit by it, by practising patience, mortification, meekness and forbearance, and that your sister, on her side, should humble herself, and love her humiliation. We see that water is brought from the finest springs by pipes of iron, of lead and of wood; this same water, passing through these channels, still comes from the spring to the places where it is wanted. In like manner, all our adversities and contradictions come from the sweet and first spring of the Deity. Though they pass through creatures and come to us from them, as through channels, we must never look at the means by which these bitter waters come to us, but must adore the source whence they are derived, and always turn our eyes to God in our troubles and adversities, to receive them from His adorable Hand. We should be extremely glad to have occasions to suffer and practice virtue, which is never better acquired, than when combated by its contrary, though God is able to give it to us in an instant. But He seldom works such miracles, and will have us, ordinarily, pass by a dark road and remain in low places till His Hand raises us to His dwelling place to make known to us His secrets.

We are, it may be, very far from the sentiments of that soul mentioned in Philothea, who went to St. Athanasius, to beg him to give her a mistress harsh and difficult to serve, so that, by serving her, she might have something to endure, and exercise herself in virtue. When she saw that she had met with a good, gentle, and virtuous mistress, who gave her nothing to suffer, because the Saint had not well understood her intention, she went to him again, and begged him so effectually, that her design was accomplished, for this great Saint gave her a cross-grained, irascible and headstrong mistress, who tried her marvelously, and gave her full satisfaction and matter to profit

by, that she might become perfect. Oh, my dear sisters, we would not do the same, for we wish the sisters with whom we live, to be so gentle, so cordial in our regard, as not to say the least word which may touch or mortify us. All the officers should have their aids tractable and condescending. In truth they must obey, simply because the superior has placed them under the officers, and she has authority over all, as the head of the community. But the officers must not exercise authority over their aids; they are to ask them cordially and kindly, because they have only a borrowed authority over them.

The assistant of the community ought not to act with absolute power as the superior would do, for she has only that which the superior commits to her, the mother being the one who has been chosen above all the others. But the sisters are still to render her, in the absence of the superior, the same honors and obedience as to the superior herself, because the latter has made over to her her power and authority.

The officers must not then act as mistresses over their aids; they must tell them humbly, and meekly, what they must do, speaking to them with cordial respect: "Sister, will you kindly do this," or, "Be so good as to do this, if you please." The aids may give their opinion, simply saying: "It seems to me this would be well done so," or, "we used to do things thus," and similar little words, according to occasions; then, they will do as the officer wills, without controlling her or showing feelings and repugnances, if what they have said is not made account of. Those who have the charges must not act as if they understood everything, without asking cordially the opinion and sentiment of their aids.

In fine, my dear daughters, be gentle, kind, loving, and united, having only one heart and one soul; bear with one another, love one another, and thereby, it will be known that you are true servants of God, and true daughters of our blessed Father, whose accidental glory we shall increase and augment, by all the acts of virtue we shall perform, and by practising the holy teachings He has given us. I entreat you, my dear daughters. Let us be faithful to these, so that we may not rob Him of what we owe Him.

FIFTH DAY.

CONFERENCE XL.

*On the Spirit of Humility, the Distinctive Character of
our Institute.*

THE excellence of the spirit of our Institute consists in the love of humility, lowliness and abjection. When this humility shall decay, our excellence will fail. To be true Daughters of the Visitation, we must be truly humble, despise honor, and esteem contempt.

When God finds in a soul a lowly mind, He gives it great graces, and imparts to it very special lights and favors. Indeed, this very lowliness is one of the greatest graces that it can receive. If we had our eyes open, and our inner taste well disposed to relish the fruits of humility and annihilation, we should be in continual happiness; since it is that alone which can render us rich and well pleasing in the sight of God, in Whose eyes all that is not virtue is nothing.

The true spirit of the Institute, my dear daughters, is none other than that of our Lord, truly humble, truly simple, upright, sincere, and joyous, in holy innocence and freedom.

It is only the humble who glorify and honor God aright, because, acknowledging that of themselves they are nothing and can do no good thing, they render to God the honor and glory of all the good they do, knowing and confessing that He is the fount and origin of all graces and virtues. God is pleased to do great things by humble souls, souls that are really humble of heart.

ALL the Daughters of the Visitation are obliged, by their vocation, to seek, in all their exercises, their humiliation and abasement. God only favors souls which are humble and which put their whole trust in Him. The greatest abjection and vileness that can be in any soul, after sin, is to be without virtue.

Humility and charity are the mothers of virtues: the one lowers us to nothingness, by the proper knowledge of what

we are ; and the other raises us to the union of our souls with God ; all other virtues follow those two, as chickens their mother. Humility is a precious coin for gaining heaven. There is no perfection without humility, and we have as many degrees of perfection as we have of humility, and no more.

Virtue is hidden from the eyes of those who possess it, and is seen by others. The way to possess interior peace is to have genuine and most sincere humility, for the truly humble man has nothing to trouble him.

Humility of heart is nothing else than genuine knowledge that we are nothing, that we can do nothing, and desiring, with true desire, that others should hold and treat us as such. It is that which is called humility of heart, which makes us annihilate ourselves in everything without exception, and consider ourselves always better treated and esteemed than we deserve.

The humbler we are the holier we are, and no more ; and if we bear little fruit, it is because we do not annihilate ourselves enough in ourselves. However, if a man does not mortify himself nor does violence to himself, he will never bring forth the fruits of the will of God.

My daughters, we should regard the glory of our Institute and the esteem in which it is held, not in ourselves, but in God, from Whom it comes ; and never turn aside, for all the glory of the world, from the love of our low estate, vileness, and abjection. It is a terribly evil thing in us, religious souls, to love our own reputation and fear that some grains of the same be taken away from us, because we must be absolutely abandoned to the Providence of God, without Whose permission nothing can happen to us, for the essence of humility consists in having a will entirely submissive to the will of God.

To frankly accuse ourselves of our faults is one of the truest marks of humility in a soul, as, on the contrary, the excusing of our faults and failings is an evident sign of very great pride. It is not possible to have peace, or at least true interior peace from virtue, except by means of humility sincerely practised. By humility, we overcome all temptations. O humility ! foundation of all virtues : humility without which, as a foundation, no virtue can

subsist! In a word, sisters, humility is the princess and queen of all other virtues. I desire that we may all be saints, but saints of purest purity, and most profound humility.

The love of our own esteem is a helmet and a breast-plate to the soul, preventing it from receiving and being susceptible to the dart of the love of God.

SIXTH DAY.

CONFERENCE XVII., HELD AUG. 28, 1630.

On Humility and Solid Virtue.

My dear sisters, I have often told you, that I do not profess to preach nor to speak of spiritual things, having but little skill in them. Let us, then, prefer to converse of the holy humility of our great father, St. Augustine. This was his most excellent and eminently peculiar virtue. "If I am asked," says he, "the way to heaven, I shall answer you, it is humility; and if I am asked again, by what road can we go to heaven, I shall still answer: by humility, by humility."

What more perfect humility than to have written down all his sins, to publish them to the whole earth, that everyone might know, in the ages to come, that Augustine had been a great sinner. This was, indeed, to be dead to all self-esteem so as to prize only what is eternal. I often tell you, sisters, that all our ills come from our not looking enough to eternity; this is what carries us to love only low and perishable things.

There are three things which we only get rid of with difficulty; the first is, honor, love, and esteem of ourselves; the second, love of our bodies and their comforts; and the third is, the hatred which we have for interior and exterior submission.

Now, if we consider well, what this life is which is so short and full of misery, what account can we make of ourselves? True humility tends to the contempt of this

self-esteem, and makes us love to be held poor, ignorant, little and imperfect, and to be forgotten by all creatures. In a word, we shall never be humble but when we shall hold ourselves for little nothings; and when we shall have reached this degree of loving to be held and to esteem ourselves as the refuse of the house, we will be very happy and very great in God's eyes. Alas! see what has become of so many creatures who have been so great and so honored in this world! Hell has received many, purgatory fewer, heaven a few only.

As to the second subject of our attachments, which is the love of our bodies and of our little comforts: Ah! my dear sisters, let us consider that nothing of what we have is our own; it is only borrowed goods. Our true goods, our own are not so small and contemptible; they are on high, and they are incorruptible goods. Our garments shall be there, of wondrous beauty, and they who shall, with good heart, wear the meanest rags here below, shall receive there the richest; thus, she who is poorest here, shall be happiest there. For our food, God forbid that any of His spouses should ever take pleasure in corruptible meats. We are to take them by obedience as a good which is common to us with the dumbest animals, because the true life of the soul wedded to God is God Himself, Who will become our eternal food, satisfying us, in glory and throughout eternity, with His beatific union.

As to our will, ought we not to be ashamed to follow it, since Jesus Christ has passed His life in obedience, and has gloried only in doing and following the Will of His Father? The great gain of the soul is this submission to God's good pleasure, for this it is which unites it most intimately to Himself and His love. Henceforth, let us be more solid in virtue, and think that all the steps we take herein are so many steps of the ladder to mount to that happy and ever to be desired eternity, on which we ought to think without ceasing, that we may despise the more all that passes away. I tell you, over and over again, thousands of times, yearly, and I say it once more: let us labor, and that solidly, at that high virtue which God wills from us. We have great and good sentiments of love for this good God! We have excellent desires and we make good

resolutions, but when it is time to come to acts we play the child, and have no constancy and no courage. Oh! how great is my desire to see us faithful in throwing aside our little tendernesses, to see us high-souled women, who do everything for God, be it sweet or bitter, easy or difficult! No, my daughters, it is not failing in magnanimity or rather in solidity of virtue, when we feel repugnance, rebellions, contradictions, provided we make them no concession and disown them; for always here below, the flesh will struggle with the spirit, human against divine prudence, pride against humility, the lower part against the higher. Are we, then, to say that they who feel these motions are vicious with the vice which is attacking them? Oh! no, for these combats, temptations and trials are given them in order to put a nail in the solidity of the contrary virtue. Thus a sister has a charge for which she has an extreme repugnance, and this repugnance accompanies her in all the actions she performs in fulfilment of her duty. I tell you, that provided that sister be careful to perform her charge well, and neglect nothing, and direct all her intentions to God, she gains more than if she performed this same charge with great pleasure, inclination, and satisfaction.

You ask me, my dear sisters, what is solid virtue? It is virtue exercised and acquired amid difficulties and in fighting with its contrary. We are only religious that we may acquire it, and may God grant that at the hour of our death we be victorious in this fight, and find that we have acquired a single real virtue. For example, you wish to be like our Father, St. Augustine, a truly humble person. You must love contempt; you must know and acknowledge that you are vile and abject, and wish to be so considered, that in whatever you do you may seek to annihilate and humble yourself. Our meek Jesus says: Learn of Me to be meek and humble of heart. If we are learning to be lowly as He was, we shall be so not only by obeying perfectly, by submitting to live under obedience, as He did under the guidance of St. Joseph, by humbling ourselves as He humbled Himself; but we shall follow Him in His supreme humiliation which was, to let Himself be humbled by His creatures, to have appeared a simple man, worthy

of being despised, and of being made the laughing stock and derision of His people. Act, therefore, in this way : humble yourselves faithfully and with fervor, and when others shall humble you, bear it with courage : leave yourselves in the hands of God and of obedience. Whether He place you here or there ; whether they turn you on one side or the other, in all that we must let them do with us as with a bit of clay which is trampled under foot, which is moulded and broken and moulded anew just as they will ; that is solid virtue.

My dear sister, let us begin to walk in this way, under the protection of the great St. Augustine. Yes, sisters, the true religious virtues are : profound humility, humble submission, a complete surrender of ourselves into the hands of God, a strong renunciation of all the things of this world, and a generous and high-minded resolution which is not astonished at difficulties, but which, knowing its own weakness, leans on the support and on the strength of the grace of its Beloved, and perseveres all through life in the good it has begun.

There is no better mark that one is not worthy of a charge, than when she desires it and thinks herself capable of it, for if she were fit for it, she would consider herself unworthy of it. It is downright folly to desire anything apart from God, because we shall have neither the thing desired, nor the possession of God, which is the enjoyment of all good. It is also a secret pride not to desire employment, and to wish to be discharged from those which obedience has given us, because we are to leave ourselves absolutely at God's disposal, and believe that these positions will be taken from us when it shall be seen that we do not perform them well. Indeed, it is because we are not humble enough, and the love of abjection does not accompany us on all occasions, and we are fearful that it will be said ; sister has been removed from this employment because she did no good in it.

My daughters, ask for nothing, wish for nothing, and refuse nothing ; be indifferent in all things, be as ready to receive a charge as to be removed from it, and you will have true virtue.

If we knew, sisters, the value of obedience we should not

let slip any occasion of practising it. Yes, merely to bow the head in token of obedience, although with repugnance of the inferior part, gains for us a greater good than we should possess if we had in our hands the empire of the world. We learn this from the choice which the Incarnate Wisdom made when He came down to earth. It was not of the riches and grandeurs of this world which He chose, but obedience only, and He lived in submission to St. Joseph and to Mary, His mother, and to His eternal Father, even to the death of the cross.

No, sister, we are never right in excusing ourselves, but we are quite right in accusing ourselves. There is nothing which sheds a holier and sweeter perfume in a community than a humble soul which accuses itself frankly; and, on the other hand, there is nothing so offensive as one who covers her faults, when admonished of them, saying merely: "I humbly acknowledge my fault." Ah! sister, I know at once the pride hidden in those few words. Say quite simply: "Mother, I humbly acknowledge having done it," that it may be known you take the fault upon you: if you have not, perhaps, done it this time, you may have at another. We are only to admonish of certain faults of which we are not to be ashamed to avow ourselves guilty, and humility is well seen on these occasions, and we shall ever find our profit and advancement in perfection, where we find causes for humbling ourselves. In fact, the humble soul always accuses herself, and the proud excuses herself unceasingly. Let us ask our great Father, St. Augustine, to obtain for us this true treasure of real humility, which has made him greater in heaven than his eminent doctrine, and all his other virtues. Praised be God and His great servant, Augustine!

SEVENTH DAY.

CONFERENCE VIII.

On Self-love and the Damage it does the Soul.

THERE are souls which are so full of themselves, that they show it in all they do, in their work, in their words, and in their manner of acting. But there are some, who are still more deep; they dissimulate, and yet when I speak to them, I see self-love dancing inside them. Ah! we must be very careful to empty ourselves of self by complete self-denial and mortification.

You ask me if a soul cannot be very full of itself without knowing it? Yes, that is very possible. But, certainly, those souls do not read the Conferences of our blessed Father, and do not penetrate deeply enough into this true science, which teaches us nothing so much as abasement of self. For if, indeed, we read and practised these, we should be braver women than we are. Indeed, I would that we were all quite perfect with the perfection which our saint has taught us. We are good souls, true; we go to the office, we keep silence, that is well. We make no reply to obedience, that is good also; but have these souls which do outward things so well any inward trial? No. Ah! give them a touch of that, and at once you will know what they are. Prick them, and you will see how quick and sensitive they are and how they nurse their feelings! I know, indeed, that to have feelings and passions which are quickly and promptly moved, when we are found fault with, is nothing, and is no hindrance to perfection, provided that we do not follow them. Oh! how often we have been taught this doctrine!

Let then those who have not strong passions, nor feelings of repugnance not think themselves the most perfect; but, on the contrary, those who have the strongest have many more means of establishing themselves in, and of acquiring true and solid virtue, if they are faithful to God. But when one conquers herself, you say, or practises some good action, there comes a certain complacency and

satisfaction which spoils all, and makes us lose all, if we take not good heed. You say, truly, my dear daughter; and, what a misfortune, when, after having made some good sacrifices, we take complacency in ourselves on account of them; is not all lost? But, if we can never, or rarely, do good without some satisfaction resulting from it, that is not evil; but, to entertain ourselves with it, and to take pleasure in it, this is what spoils all. And what must we do in that case? We must crush those thoughts of complacency and vain satisfaction, humble ourselves and seek humiliation, give glory to God for all, and acknowledge that of ourselves we can do nothing. In one word, we must be faithfully faithful and humbly humble; the meaning of which is, we must, in all things, seek only the glory of God, and do nothing but to please Him; nothing for ourselves or for creatures, but all for God; humble ourselves both for good and for evil, but with real, faithful, and sincere humility. I do not see that we profit by our faults; we do not humble ourselves sufficiently for them, we are not sufficiently in love with our humiliation.

There are souls, already a long time in religion, who never have any peace, because they do not labor at an absolute renunciation of their own sentiments. They have been told, and told again, many times, what they are to do in these troubles, and instead of keeping firm and resting in that, and bearing their cross meekly and patiently (for this state is a cross), they wish ever to have new things said to them, and herein have their will and inclination. Hence it comes that they are not tranquil, as they would be, if they resolved to carry patiently this little cross.

We must, also, animate our outward actions with extreme attention, which gives us courage to bear our troubles, and to labor to acquire perfection, not because it is a good thing, nor for the good which comes to us from it, but because by so doing we please God. We must come into this house, not to feel fervent, but to labor for profound humility, submission, mortification, and renunciation; and not solely to flee occasions of doing evil and to have more means of doing good, but to please God, and do all things for the love of Him. You think when you have

passed your year of novitiate, and wear the black veil, that all is done. Oh! indeed, you are mistaken, for you must be always beginning, doing all your actions with the same fervor, as on your first day. We must often consider our rules, and compare what we are with what we ought to be. I would, indeed, that we should very often think on the excellence of our calling, and that we should strive to render ourselves such as it requires us to be. It demands that we be humble, meek, obedient, and simple; we must not live according to our inclinations and aversions; this is what we must do, nor must we stop short till we have gained the true spirit.

Would that I had coals of fire to cast into your hearts that I might inflame them; but I am not worthy to render this service to our Lord, or to the house.

We must increase our courage in order to arrive at perfection. We can never arrive at it without the mortification of our passions. Let each one look at what is in her, and let her undertake, in good earnest, to become better.

We are to foster a great respect for one another; to this our rules oblige us; and, certainly, where there is no respect, there is no love.

We must take heed of the vice of negligence, it is a great evil for religious. If you are neglectful and take no care to purge your heart of this imperfection, and if you battle not generously with this evil inclination, you will be religious in dress only.

There are few persons who serve God purely. We are so full of self that it is pitiable. Our works are done out of human respect, or through some impure intention. I am not speaking of great impurities, that is not my meaning; but of intentions very far from those we ought to have of serving God, purely to please Him, by doing all for Him with lively and simple affection.

My daughters, to serve God barely and simply is not to cover and double our actions, for what is simple is not double; what is bare is not covered. Look at my hand; it cannot be more naked and simple than it is, and so must we be without having any other intention than to please Him. To serve God purely, means not to seek for

consolations, out of self-love, but to serve Him as faithfully amid dryness and aridity as in feelings and delights.

We know that we desire consolations out of self-love, when we are troubled at not having them, and when we are more negligent in God's service. No, we must not desire them. . . . But are they sometimes useful? Yes, chiefly for beginners. Therefore, we see our Lord is wont to give them at that time. But we, who have been long at it, must eat the crusts.

There is no doubt, my daughters, that a soul who was attacked all day by useless thoughts, and who was faithful in bringing the mind back to God immediately on perceiving it, would do as much for Him, and even more, than one who had great facility in turning to God, and in turning away from and withdrawing from useless things; true virtue consists in that. Let those who are in that state practice with courage and faithfulness this returning to God, and let them persevere therein, for I assure them it is the true means of acquiring perfection in a short time.

EIGHTH DAY.

CONFERENCE XXXIII.

On Prayer and Mortification.

INDEED! I have no other design nor wish, but that you should remain quiet and tranquil near our Lord during prayer, and that beginners at it should make use of their imagination, because, ordinarily, they have their minds full of the world, of their relatives, and other vanities. When they are meditating on the mysteries of the Passion, let them print vividly in their minds the torments which our Lord has suffered for us. For example: when they are considering the scourging, they must represent to themselves the mystery as if they were at the very place; by this imagination, well impressed in their minds, they will rid themselves of troubles and cares for the things of earth.

But when souls begin to advance, they must be guided by a truth still higher, which is that our Lord suffers no more, but that He has suffered; and they must be taught to say some words to Him on what He has endured for love of us, and abide in that simple thought. But, if God chooses to occupy us with Himself at the commencement of our meditation, there is no need to go in search of our point. Let us keep ourselves, quiet, near Him without making our imagination labor much, nor saying many words, for, in general, that hinders us from drawing good affections which is, however, true prayer. In a word, considerations are only made in order to stir up our affections. But, it happens sometimes that the soul is occupied on some of the divine attributes, as, for example; on the greatness, the goodness, the power of God. We must then be careful to walk in this way, as long as God calls us thereto. But, when He withdraws this simple and loving view, the soul becomes quite chilled and oppressed in heart; then it must open the door to words of love and submission, or at other times, of adoration and acquiescence in His divine will. When we meditate on the scourging, and see our Lord suffering this cruel punishment, we must say: "O my Lord! how hast Thou digned to lower Thyself to suffer these lashes of the scourge!" Then, if you feel your affections stirred by these few words, you must stop there: and, afterwards, when the affection is passed, you must make use of others, always according as you are drawn.

There are souls which go with so much eagerness and affection to prayer, that it is a great pleasure to see them. They become so warm in their words, that they hardly give themselves time to breathe. They say with such great affection: "Ah! Lord! . . ." that it seems they wish to melt away and be consumed before Him. We must not do that, but make the meditation with much tranquillity and calm. When we enter upon it, we must prostrate ourselves in the spirit of humility before our Lord, take our point quietly, until our affections be stirred. We must never be astonished if we have no feelings in prayer, for these are not what God asks of us; but, to be quiet, tranquil, and humble. If, at the end

of the meditation, we feel no affection, we must say to our Lord: "It is true, O my God! that I feel no affection, but, I will, nevertheless, be very gentle among the sisters,"—and go from prayer with this affection of sweetness. Thus, although we may have no consolation in prayer, we shall still be very gentle and tranquil. We must speak to our Lord very familiarly, heart to heart, and so softly that our good angel hear it not.

You ask, my daughter, when you have committed some faults, if it would be good to think thereon at meditation, so as to humble yourself for them? Yes, you may do so, but very simply; for, if you wished to look in detail at your failings and the persons against whom you have committed them, there would be danger, that instead of speaking to God, you would be speaking to creatures, and that would distract you. It is enough to say: "Ah, Lord! Thou knowest my wretchedness!" and then stop, for He knows it well enough, without our representing it to Him in detail.

You ask, my dear daughter, if we are not to listen to our Lord speaking in our heart? Most certainly; yes, I advise you to do this, and after you have run over your point a little, you must listen to Him, for it is by that means that He will give you good desires of serving Him.

You ask, my daughter, if we meditated without knowing what we were doing and what were our affections at the time? O! indeed! we must not do that, we should be losing our time to no purpose. We should always know in what we are occupied, and what affections God has given us therein, at least in will, for we must never stop at the feeling. We should never leave prayer without making good and efficacious resolutions, that is to say, they must produce works, for, otherwise, it would be of no use to make them.

My dear daughters, you must know that meditation is to be so followed by mortification, that at the same time that we advance in prayer, we must advance in mortification; and, with the same pace that we walk in the mortification must we advance also in prayer. I always come back to this. Mortification must be our plank for entering on prayer.

Although it is at prayer that we receive good inspirations, it is always by means of mortification that we obtain them. We should be the same out of prayer, as we would desire to be during it. We must take great care, during the day, to keep our mind in God, to empty it of everything useless, especially of that with which we have nothing to do, because, when we let it become dissipated, we render it unfit to be united to God, to meditate and pray.

I strongly commend to you, my dear daughters, cordial prayer, that is prayer which is not made by the understanding, but by the heart. It is practised in this way ; when we are humbled before God, and have placed ourselves in His presence, let us not force our brain to make considerations ; but, let us make use of our affections, exciting them to the best of our power. When we cannot excite them by interior words, we should employ vocal words, as the following : “ I thank Thee, O my God, because Thy goodness permits me to be here, before Thy Face, I who am mere nothingness.” Another time : “ O my Lord ! grant me the grace to learn how to speak to Thee, for I prefer this happiness to all other.” In fact, we must go to prayer with great simplicity. But, for those who take our Lord in the garden of Olives and lead Him to Calvary, I advise them to stop, for they are making a long way in a short time, and are going too quickly.

Now, for imagination ; it is good for souls in trouble. It is a good means of diverting them from their trouble and from useless things. There are some, who can do nothing at meditation but keep themselves with great honor and respect before God, and this prayer is good. Others have a thousand sorts of evil thoughts and feelings ; this is to endure and suffer, and is still prayer. Others again have many distractions ; for them much patience is necessary ; and, provided these be not wilful, the prayer is still good. In fine, there are others who go to prayer and find our Lord as they wish, and treat with Him according to their desire ; that is the prayer of repose, wherein there is more to enjoy than to suffer. They who are slothful in prayer go to ruin from the root. Certainly, we must have especial care to combat slothfulness, for it brings immense harm to the soul. To be a soul of prayer, is to have great

love for it, to be faithful in preparing for it, to be very punctual in observing all the circumstances required for praying well, to be faithful in casting aside all the distractions which occur to us therein. This is to be a soul of prayer.

NINTH DAY.

CONFERENCE LII. HELD IN 1634, WHEN THE SAINT
WAS IN RETREAT WITH FIVE OR SIX SISTERS.

*On Fidelity in Accomplishing the Resolution of the Retreat,
and especially in Avoiding the least Voluntary Faults.*

(SPEAKING of the love we ought to have for our abjection, our holy Mother said to us:)

Great matter indeed ! Let persons be the most faulty, the most wretched in the world, if they love their abjection, humility atones for all. But, alas ! most frequently, we want to have this or that ; we want to have grand sentiments, high things, and God does not wish it. He permits us to have a certain temptation, and wishes us to love our own abjection therein.

In order, really, to get the benefit of retreat, we must not be satisfied with making and writing good resolutions, but we must read them two or three times a day, and hold ourselves ever in readiness to practice them when the time comes. Above all we must prepare ourselves for this, when going to the place where mortifications and admonitions are given, which we should receive at once, with humility. Afterwards we should not let our mind reflect thereon, nor think that it is done through aversion ; for very often we are the cause of our distractions, and we are our own tempters.

The spirit of the Visitation is a spirit which leads to a high perfection, which is not acquired, but by the practice of solid virtues.

We ought to take our recreation with joy and gladness, during the half-hour allowed by the Book of Customs, but

we should not let ourselves give way to excessive joy, which might dissipate the mind. We must not confound times ; for this reason it is better not to make prayers and mortifications during the time of recreation. But the half-hour being past, we may all together salute the Blessed Virgin by a *Salve Regina* or other prayers, for it is no longer the time of recreation. In like manner, in the evening, we may go and say, all together, the Litany of our Blessed Father, in his oratory, after the said half-hour.

(The last evening we begged her Charity to give us a watchword, which we should remember. This incomparable Mother answered us. I have already thought about this seven or eight times, but nothing has come into my mind save fidelity, real, great fidelity to our resolutions. I know that God has given to each of you light enough to know her needs, and I think, that all have made the resolutions they knew or almost knew before the retreat of what is needful for them. We do not want so many things, but only to set ourselves faithfully to practice what we have proposed on the proper occasions. But we must not be weakly faithful to this, but loyally faithful, for, do not think, sisters, that it is as easy to practice them as to think them. Oh ! no, indeed, that would be to deceive ourselves. We must write and engrave them on the parchment of our hearts, and not on paper, where they are of little use, if we have not this fidelity. By this, I do not mean that we must not write them ; for, therein, I leave to each the liberty which is given her ; but I say that we must call them to mind, at least two or three times a day, and put them in practice ; in fine, we must combat and get the mastery over ourselves.

I have not yet found in our Lord's words that any one has entered paradise by laughing, frolicking, and following her inclinations ; but all have entered there by the narrow gate, and our Lord, Himself, has entered by no other way. The same Lord says : " By thy words thou shalt be condemned, and by thy words thou shalt be justified."

I was reading to day, in St. Matthew, that wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and

many there are who go in thereat, but narrow is the gate, and straight is the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that find it. You see, my dear sisters, that God has taken us from the dregs of the world to place us in religion, which is the narrow way. Let us, then, carefully and faithfully walk therein : for no good is obtained without pain.

But, you say, that even though we make many resolutions, we fall again. Certainly, my dear sister, you ought to know that we are of a frail nature ; this is why we shall be liable, even till death, to commit faults by haste and surprise, and it is these of which the Scripture says, the just man sins seven times a day and rises as often. But, you say that sometimes we see a sin clearly, and then let ourselves fall into it. Oh ! my daughter, that is very serious. But, what, then, is to be done, save to humble ourselves deeply and commit as few of such faults as possible ? No, indeed, we must not commit them, if possible, for these wilful faults are highly dangerous, and one committed with our eyes open is more to be feared than a hundred others committed without thought, for those we commit without thought are also effaced without our thinking of them ; for we commit many venial sins, of which we have not always the sight. But God is so good ! He sees that we have fallen without knowing it, and He, therefore, makes us rise without our being aware of it, pardoning us, for some act of love which we make, some act of contrition, or of charity, or of humility, which we exercise towards certain sisters, or by taking holy water. But a fault committed with our eyes open, wilfully, however little it may be, is more displeasing to God, and more dangerous for our soul, than a greater one committed by surprise. Indeed, “it is not possible,” says our Blessed Father, “for a soul to make great advance, when it wilfully cherishes such faults, for they hinder us from corresponding to God’s graces.”

We must never lose courage, but rise again humbly, and if the fault requires confession, we must accuse ourselves of it with good heart. If we have offended our neighbor, that is to say, our sisters, let us do as the Custom Book orders : let us ask their pardon. This is a custom I greatly desire to see kept up here ; and to this end, sisters, I pray you to bring away from your retreats

an affection for this practice ; it is good, humble, charitable, and of good example.

Farewell, sisters, we are being separated in body, but not in spirit ; and then we must always remain united by holy love. I pray God to bless you all. I again recommend to you fidelity. And believe me, sisters, examine yourselves three or four times a day on your resolutions. And, to conclude, go, my daughters, do all the good you shall see, and avoid all the evil you may know.

TENTH DAY.

CONFERENCE XLI.

On Abandonment to Providence, another Distinctive Character of the Spirit of our Institute.

YES, sisters, it is a true point of the highest and most sublime perfection, to be entirely given over, dependent, and submissive to the events of divine Providence. If we have, indeed, surrendered ourselves thereto, we shall be as well pleased to be a hundred leagues from here, as here ; and even more so, finding therein more of God's pleasure, and less of our own satisfaction. It would be indifferent to us to be humbled or exalted, to be led by this hand or the other, to be in dryness, aridity, sorrow, and privation, or to be comforted by the divine unction and in the enjoyment of God. In fact, we should keep ourselves in the good hands of this great God, like cloth in the hands of the tailor, who cuts it in a hundred ways for use, as he pleases and as he designs, while it puts no hindrance in the way. So we should endure to have this powerful hand of God cut, hammer, chisel us just as He wishes, to make us a fit stone for the adornment of His building. Both afflictions and delights should be the same to us, while we exclaim with our great Father, St. Augustine : " Cut, sever, burn, my Lord Jesus Christ : provided I am with Thee and possess Thee, I am content ! "

Sisters, shall we never attain to the total destruction of

human sentiments and the overthrow of human prudence, so as to see with a pure eye, a true faith, the beauty and blessing of afflictions, of sufferings, of sorrows of heart, of derelictions, and sickness? The world is only attached to the skin, and goes not so far as to see the hidden pith under the sweetness of the Cross. It only sees the outside, which appears rugged and painful ; but it penetrates not to the inside, where we taste more pleasure, if we, indeed, love God, than we shall ever find in the enjoyment of the false and vain satisfactions that the same world can give. Man sees a person deserted, persecuted, and mortified. He thinks that person miserable, and would willingly weep with compassion for him, on seeing him cast off by creatures ; but if he discerned and entered into the sweetness which God makes that soul find in humiliation, he would envy it the happiness it possesses in being admitted to the honor of the divine familiarity.

It is a great mercy of divine Providence to permit the faithlessness of creatures, and to have things to go ill with us and other than we would wish them, because all that compels our heart, which God has created free and disengaged, to go to Him for repose. This poor heart is so feeble, that if it always met with satisfaction in creatures, it would go with difficulty to the Creator. The eyes of the flesh do not see this clearly, but God sees it for us. He knows that sorrow and humiliation render us conformable to His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. But for us, my dear sisters, whom the divine mercy has separated from the world, whom it has withdrawn within the cloister to distinguish from the rest of creatures by so many graces and benefits, let us be ever ready to do and suffer all that God wishes of us, and let us never say : enough of pains, of contempt, and abnegation ; but, here we are wholly submissive and ready to do Thy good pleasure. To speak in this way, is to live after the spirit, and not according to the motions of the inferior part, which has no share in this perfect manner of acting. This is the way wherein the true Daughters of the Visitation should walk.

Holy Job exclaimed on his dung-hill : “ Let Him who has begun to afflict me only finish His work in me : I take pleasure therein, because I see His will in my extreme

sufferings, and I bless His holy Name in the midst of this cruel trial." True resignation consists in the practice of this marvellous patience, and in blessing God for what He has taken from us, as well as for what He has given us. I must confess the truth to you, my dear sisters, I should have much holy joy in seeing you all truly abandoned to the good pleasure of this great God, and submissive to His divine Providence. Our Blessed Father said to me one day, that that was the only rendezvous of our heart, and we ought to have no other.

The principal work that we find in our rules and the angelic perfection to which this Institute should aspire consists not in a great multiplicity of penitential acts and works, much esteemed by the world; but it leads us to a perfection wholly hidden in God. Therein, is our excellence, to see the will of God in all things and to follow it. This hidden life leads us to union with God, separation from all created things, and to perfect purity of heart, which is infinitely pleasing to God. He has not thus hidden us except to make us live by Him and in Him. Let us, then, make of our sweet enclosure an earthly paradise, and of our cells the dwelling-place of the Spouse. Let us render our whole Monastery the place of these delights, and the noon-day where His love may come and repose. This we can do by His grace; let us only have courage, and we shall obtain this favor, by observing our rules exactly, by doing all our actions in profound, sincere, and frank humility, living in perfect abnegation of self and in poverty, stripped of all things, neither living, breathing nor aspiring but for this heavenly Spouse of our souls. Let us love our dear sisters tenderly and equally, and let us serve our Lord with a joyful mind and with contentment in the state of our calling, living, indeed, in peace and tranquillity under the wings of His divine Providence which takes such great care of us. His grace will never fail us, let us be faithful thereto; let us follow its attractions, and God will bless us with a great blessing.

EXAMINATION

OR THE

RETREAT

OF

SALNT JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL.

LIVE JESUS.

AN

EXAMINATION,

USEFUL FOR THE ANNUAL CONFESSION,

COMPOSED BY

ST. JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL.

FIRST, examine yourself as to your progress or losses since your last annual retreat. See whether or not you have acquired any bad habit which you had not before ; then cast your eyes upon the most ordinary imperfections, temptations, repugnances, and difficulties you had in the observance of the rules, constitutions and customs. After having sought and found the source of all these evils, discover and confess them with simplicity, and with renewed courage and resolution again resolve to tend to the perfection of your state with all your power, by the exercise of those virtues which will be particularly recommended to you.

How have you received the Sacraments? Have you not sometimes approached them through custom, imitation or fear rather than through devotion? have you not lost the fruits of them from want of preparation?

In going to confession are you glad to make yourself known as worthy of abjection? If so you will tell your sins very simply and humbly ; you will generously tell your defects with all that can render you more confused and ashamed before the confessor. Have you been faithful in correcting what you have confessed? Have you made

sincere acts of contrition before going to confession, and after confession have you been careful to thank God for this grace which is assuredly very great?

How have you made your preparation and thanksgiving for Holy Communion? Have you made any special acts of virtue for this intention, and have you kept your mind more recollected in consideration of so great a benefit? Do you not soon become distracted after Holy Communion? Have you been more humble, meek and cordial on Communion days? for these are the fruits we ought to derive from it.

Have you been careful to purify and direct your intention at the beginning of each exercise and important action, offering them to God for His glory, in honor of the most holy Virgin, or for some other intention?

Have you not been tepid in devotion, and have not practices of virtue been irksome to you? Have you not, sometimes, found the office long, meditation painful, spiritual exercises burdensome, elevations of the heart to God very difficult? Have you not assisted at, or performed these exercises without attention? Have you not trifled with the lights God has given you, as well concerning the good you should do, as the evil you should avoid, disregarding these lights, in order to commit imperfections more boldly, and to neglect more easily the good they show you?

How did you go to the office, and how did you comport yourself whilst there, as also at prayer, and at Holy Mass? In your examinations, have you not been careless in your preparation, and in subjecting your mind and attention to the teachings given you in this regard, according to what is said in the Custom Book?

Have you been prompt in rejecting distractions? Have you not caused them by neglecting to guard your eyes, or by not keeping your mind recollected during the day, amusing yourself with useless things?

How did you observe your Holy Rules, the Constitutions, and above all your sacred vows? Did you obey exactly in all things; promptly, without delay; simply, without reply; lovingly, without chagrin, or ill-humor; cordially, and cheerful, without murmur; humbly, without criticising and censuring the command? Have you not

been more exact in charges that are honorable and important, than in those that are sbject and of less importance? Have you not disobeyed, through negligence, forgetfulness, sloth, or laziness; through stubbornness, or obstinacy with deliberation; through dislike for the command, or for the one who gave it, or through want of esteem for the command, either in things of little importance or otherwise? Speak clearly on these points for they are very important. Have you not had some aversion to the superioress, which caused you to pass judgment on her words and actions, saying that she spoke or acted through passion, self-interest, particular affection, vanity and the like? But what would be still worse, have you not despised her in your heart, disesteemed her ordinances, her conduct and her judgment, especially in regard to the mortifications and corrections she may have given you? These are true marks by which you may know your defects. Have you not murmured and complained of her to the sisters, or even to externs, or when at confession, or treating of your conscience with some Father?

Have you not tried to make known her defects, or those of others, to excuse your own, or under pretext of making yourself better understood? Have you not failed in respect to her, by replies, or by contradicting her through passion, and with audacity, before the sisters, refusing to obey her, in order to do your own will, through obstinacy or otherwise? Our obedience should be established in a perfect abnegation of self-will and judgment.

Respecting holy poverty. Have you not appropriated to yourself, either in effect, or in affection, something, whether little or great? Have you not murmured when something was wanting to you, or when what was given was not to your liking, whether in food, medicine, clothing, bedding, or some other corporal convenience?

Have you asked, taken or given anything without leave?

Have you asked, desired or kept, without necessity, something which you foresaw might afterwards be of service to you?

If in any charge, have you served the sisters without choice? Have you given them, willingly and cheer-

fully, the things under your charge without any other consideration than necessity alone?

Have you preferred yourself in the distribution of anything whatever? because our poverty should be despoiled of all things.

Our chastity should be angelic, therefore, examine if your imagination, thoughts, desires, feelings, have been without attack, or, at least, without fault. Make this examination very simply, though faithfully, and accuse yourself of the faults you may remark, with a most generous humility and confidence.

Towards Ourselves.

Well ordered love, will make you have great care of the purity and advancement of your soul in perfection, and very little care and affection for your body, the care of which you will leave to your superioress.

Have you not esteemed yourself above your neighbor? Have you not desired to be esteemed? Have you not tried to show your great knowledge of spiritual things, speaking of interior things, and saying words to authorize your opinion, and even obstinately maintaining it through vanity or pride? Have you not spoken advantageously of yourself and of what belonged to you, of the good you have done and still do, proposing yourself as an example to others, under pretext of edifying your neighbor, and causing her to do likewise?

Have you not spoken of your relatives and of the advantages you had in the world, or of the honor that was there shown you? Or have you not spoken of things still more vain, such as dancing, playing, dressing, walking, of having had advantageous offers of marriage, and such like follies, amusing yourself by thinking of them, and flattering yourself in the vain belief that you were esteemed, loved, and admired? Have you not by artful words, inquired what was said of you in your absence, especially when it was to your praise? Have you not by some amusing words, tried to prolong the discourse, when it tended to your own praise, or that of those you love, and even sought to increase it? Have you not entertained,

yourself with persons, not so much for their virtues and merit and the duty you owed them, as through vanity, because they love you, and make great account of you, or praise you, thinking it will tend to your honor when it is known that they consider you possessed of a good heart, sound mind and judgment, and that your conversation is agreeable?

Have you not taken delight in speaking of the conversations you have had with some distinguished persons, relating the counsels you have asked and the answers given when you judged them suitable to the purpose? All this is very vain.

Have you never taken pleasure, or amused yourself in relating dreams, through vanity, telling your thoughts and desiring good interpretations to be drawn from them? Has it not pained you to hear others praised and to know they are loved and esteemed, lest it might tend to your disadvantage? Have you not tried to lessen the praise given to others, either by your words, or by your silence; and what would be still worse, have you not related their faults on these occasions, through jealousy, pride, or envy, or through fear of not being loved, esteemed, and preferred?

Have you not resented humiliations and corrections, murmured at them in thought and word? Have you not lost affection, conceived aversion for, and failed in confidence towards those who have humbled you or warned you of your defects? Have you not felt pain when employed in low and servile things, and a disgust for the less important charges, loving to be employed and acting with greater care in the more honorable offices desiring, under some pretext, the more elevated charges? This is very prejudicial and an assured mark of little virtue.

Have you not yielded to impatience, with yourself and others for slight causes; have you been subject to feelings of anger, giving vent to them by words, actions, or resentment? Were the faults you committed deliberate, or did they proceed from impulse? Have you shown spite upon slight contradictions? Were the words you used to express your feelings on such occasions, bitter, harsh, dry, cold, haughty or cutting, meant to wound her who had displeased you, or were they uttered through a spirit of revenge?

Have you entertained these feelings, showing by your countenance and manner that you were still offended with her, answering shortly, or pretending not to understand what she says or the like defects?

Have you not acquiesced in the will of seculars, or others, through human respect, or the fear of displeasing them, losing the offices or other exercises, without necessity to entertain them with vain and frivolous things, listening at length to unnecessary news and the like, without interrupting them because of the pleasure you took in them; looking at their vanity and smiling at their folly, besides committing acts of levity and indiscretion which gave them confidence to take liberties unbecoming your state? Have you not permitted too great familiarity in your intercourse with them? All this is evil and detrimental to perfection.

Have you not uselessly multiplied your words, and used terms of exaggeration to testify your affection for them, praising them, telling them you esteem them, prefer them, speak well of them in their absence, think of them, or that you desire to see them? On the other hand have you not been too cold and reserved, and failed to testify the sweet and holy cordiality your institute requires?

Have you not sometimes told untruths through impetuosity, want of consideration, to excuse yourself or to give greater value to what you relate? Have you not disguised the truth, concealing your intentions, in indifferent things under pretext of good, or some other motives? If you do so often, especially in rendering an account of your interior, it would be very injurious, still more so, if you acted thus in confession.

Have you employed artifice to make known you were sick, or that you had need of something, without telling it, or asking for what you wanted lest you might be thought too tender or immortalized?

Have you not feigned more sorrow for your faults than you really had in your heart? You will know this, if you have been as contrite when these faults were known to yourself alone, as when you were told of them or admonished for them. Did not the tears you shed, or the words of exaggeration you used proceed from pride, which

was displeased because your failings were remarked, or was gratified by showing that you recognized your faults and had a very low opinion of yourself and all you did?

Have you not made vain reflections, when rendering an account of the good you have accomplished, and of the extraordinary graces God has given you in prayer, speaking obscurely, pretending shame and intermingling your defects? All this is but pride, which makes you fear that it will be thought that you make a great account of all this, which is a great want of simplicity. Have you not sought to cover your defects, especially when they were abject, using many words to make it appear that you had just occasion for committing them?

Have you not pretended more sickness than you really felt, when you were treated as infirm? On such occasions did not the refusal of food, of service, or some convenience, proceed from vain courage and from an act of duplicity, rather than from a desire of suffering want or inconvenience? You will know this if your heart remained tranquil in suffering, and if you did not amuse yourself in thinking of your wants. Have you not refused some comfort or relief, apparently through virtue, when it was really through immortification that you refused it, because it was not pleasing to you? All this is hypocrisy, and deceit, or vanity. Have you not shown yourself courageous before others, when they compassionated you in your pains and sufferings, being, in private, careful to seek the cause of your illness and the most exquisite remedies?

Have you not, been troubled when your ailment was not considered as great as it is or as it seems to you to be, observing even the least and smallest pains?

Have you not, through sensuality, artfully tried to make known, that you desired or liked something that it might be given you? Have you not been dainty in your food, whether in health, or in sickness, delicate and difficult to please, wishing only what was to your taste, though injurious to your health? Have you complained of not being well treated, because you thought others were not sufficiently eager to find out what you desired when you were sick? When the food was to your liking did you not indulge too freely even though it was but water or fruit? Have you not

been disturbed, because the nights appeared long, your sufferings great, and the remedies disagreeable? Was it not with regret you obeyed the infirmarian, as well as the physician, doing it with ill-humor, murmuring and complaining at what was ordered?

Finally, see how you have exercised yourself in the mortification of your heart, which is done by overcoming self-will and judgment, the passions and inclinations, by submitting in all, and condescending freely to the will of others.

Towards our Neighbors.

Do you, love all your neighbors cordially, and for the love of God, as well in general as in particular? If you love your neighbors and sisters who are awkward and uncouth, as well as those whose qualities are naturally well pleasing to you, your love is good; if otherwise, it is imperfect, and very often hurtful. Examine well, if you treat with them with openness and frankness of heart; if you do them no injury in one way or another; if you pray to God, as earnestly for those who are disagreeable, as for those who are pleasing to you. Have you been wanting in the support you owe your neighbor, in her corporal or spiritual infirmities? Have you not judged rashly those, for whom you have not much love?

Have you not suspected them on slight appearances? Have you not penetrated into their intentions and designs, according to your fancies and to their disadvantage, sometimes through passion, at other times through a spirit of vanity, pretending to be very learned in the discernment of spirits, the interior life, natural dispositions and defects? then boasting of the judgments you have formed, and sometimes affirming them as true, on the experience you, yourself, have had of such defects? Have you not spoken of their sins and imperfections, complaining, through passion and with exaggeration, of their ill-humor, and all this without necessity, to satisfy the aversion or displeasure you have received from them.

Have you not experienced a feeling of joy when those who happened to contradict you, were mortified? This is a spirit of revenge. Have you not said some little words

among the sisters to cause them to be advertised, for what they did to displease you? Or, if you, yourself, advertised them, were you actuated by this same motive, and did you not exaggerate their defects, or mis-interpret their actions towards you? This would be a great want of charity.

Have you not despised your sisters, in thought or deed, whether because of their mind, looks or manners, finding fault with all they did or said; and what would be still worse, did you despise them because of their condition, origin, or the lowliness of their birth? This would be a most insupportable vanity. Of lowly condition yourself have you never in heart or action elevated yourself above others? Have you never uttered harsh, painful, or cutting words to wound and offend your sisters, or even seculars, contesting and replying with impatience, maintaining your own opinion, by your arrogance and self-sufficiency? This would be a very great evil, and would greatly scandalize your neighbor.

Have you not disputed imperiously, despising the advice and judgment of those with whom you were treating? All this is very wrong. Have you not been subject to envy, which caused you to rejoice when those, whom you saw esteemed, committed faults, and that these faults were remarked? Has it not pained you, to see them excused or relieved in anything? Examine well your heart on all this, and declare all as openly and simply as you can. If you have anything which troubles you, whether doubt, temptation or difficulty, explain yourself very clearly.

This examination contains some very particular observations, which give light not only for confession, but also for the practice of virtue, and makes us see the state of the soul in this review of the year. However we are not obliged to accuse ourselves so minutely of all these things, if we do not wish. It is as necessary, however, to a traveller to know and discover the wrong road, to avoid it, as to know the right path to follow and walk in it. And truly self-love has so spread its snares throughout the whole course of the spiritual life, that it is impossible to escape, except, as the glorious St. Anthony has said, by passing beneath them, humbling ourselves profoundly, examining ourselves seriously, accusing ourselves sincerely, and all this, without

faltering ; in short, working out our salvation, with a filial and chaste fear and a holy trembling, which will make us walk in simplicity of heart, in sanctity, justice, and truth before God. May His goodness grant us this grace through the intercession of His holy Mother, St. Joseph, and our holy Founders, who desired this for us. *Amen.*

ACT OF RENOVATION OF VOWS.

BEHOLD, O my God, behold at Thy feet, an ungrateful and unfaithful soul, who has abused Thy graces, who has broken the alliance made with Thee ; who has violated the promises of her profession, and is no longer worthy to be called Thy Spouse, because she has “sinned against Heaven and before Thee.”

Ah ! Lord, I merit only Thy vengeance ; my perfidy has drawn upon me the weight of Thy anger, but reject not an humble and contrite heart. O Jesus ! hearken to my sighs and tears ! Humbled before Thee, I would wish to humble myself to the centre of the earth. Ah ! great God, enter not into judgment with Thy servant ! May Thy mercy, which alone has supported me in the past, still defend me against Thy justice. Remember that if Thou art my Judge, Thou art also my Redeemer, and that Thou hast commanded me to hope in Thee. How many signal benefits hast Thou not granted me during these days of salvation ! Thou hast prevented me by Thy grace ; Thou hast awakened new feelings in my heart ; Thou hast placed before my eyes a light that I feared, and that is, perhaps, the last ray of a light about to be extinguished. Ah ! I yield and forever to the reproaches of Thy grace and my conscience ! Woe to me if I do not profit by them. But, my divine Saviour, I will draw all possible fruit from them ; I will commence a new life, and since Thy incomprehensible goodness trusts me still, notwithstanding my many infidelities, I will renew, with as much sorrow for the past, as resolution for the future, the vows I have made before heaven and earth. Far from regretting or

wishing to take from the altar the voluntary gift of myself, that I have had the happiness of offering Thee, I wish to multiply it and make it more entire, that it may be more pleasing to Thee. If at that moment, the happiest of my life, when I publicly consecrated myself to Thee, my own heart was capable of betraying me in Thy presence, I now disavow it by new and sincere protestations. If less pure motives, or even a less pure vocation has mingled with my sacrifice anything human, and rendered it less perfect in Thy eyes, I wish, to-day, to repair all its imperfections by new promises, which neither disgust, levity or inconstancy will ever cause me to break. I regret nothing, Lord, of all that I have sacrificed in consecrating myself to Thy service. My only regret is not to have had all the pleasures, all the goods of the entire world and a thousand other worlds, to offer Thee. Why could I not, why can I not, now, make to Thee a sacrifice worthy of Thee? What is my liberty, what is my whole being, for a God, from Whom I have received, and still receive, each day, so many graces? Ah! if these vows that I have made to Thee, before Thy holy Altar, in presence of Thy holy Angels, who bore them to Heaven, that Thou mightst ratify them, were not eternal, if it were permitted me to break, or revoke, them, I would, to-day, use my liberty only to form and strengthen them. The whole world, kneeling in tears before me, would not be an obstacle sufficiently strong to retain me, so amiable and precious, do I consider these chains. Yes, O my God, if, to please Thee, I had not already renounced the world, I would do so with increased zeal and fervor. Receive, then, the only mark that I can give Thee of my sorrow for my past infidelities, my gratitude for Thy benefits, and my fidelity for the future.

I ratify, confirm, and renew the vows which I have made to Thee and by which I consecrate myself anew and forever to Thy divine service. Prostrate in body and soul before Thy adorable Majesty, I promise Thee, with all the resolution, ardor and sincerity of my soul, to be poor, chaste, and obedient.

I desire, by this renovation, to confirm the vows that I have already made. I am ready to seal them with my

blood, and I protest that I would rather die a thousand times than again transgress them.

O my divine Spouse, accept the engagements of this new contract, this new alliance, which I make with Thee ! Receive them into Thy Heart with Thy spouse, who has made them ; engrave them in indelible characters in her heart ! I desire to renew them each day of my life, happy if I could repeat them with every breath I draw, to give Thee continual proofs of my love, and have unceasingly before my eyes the happiness of my consecration.

I sacrifice to Thee my mind and all its faculties, my body and all its senses, my soul and all its powers, my heart and all its affections ; all that I have, all that I am, I devote unreservedly to Thy Majesty, in the service of religion.

I renew to Thee the sacrifice of my whole being, by renewing the vow of obedience. No more will, sentiment, or judgment, but what is conformable to Thine.

I despoil myself anew of all self-interest, by renewing the vow of poverty. I wish to be poor, O divine Jesus, as Thou wast. Anathema to my heart, if it appropriates to itself the slightest thing, if it makes use of the greatest necessities, except as means to rise, each moment, to Thee, Who art its principle, centre, and term.

With the same fervor, I renew the vow of chastity, which engages me to lead an angelic life in a mortal body. I will, O my God, by a holy vigilance, avoid all that can tarnish the purity of my body, mind and heart. Holy, pure and perfect love come and establish in me your dwelling ! Ah ! Lord, may a premature death separate me from myself, rather than that I should forget the promises I have again made to Thee !

O treasure of true goods, source of the purest satisfactions, goodness and beauty, without measure, O Jesus ! dispose of my soul, so that it may find its happiness in the faithful practice of its engagements, its true riches in poverty, its holy delights in chastity, its profound peace in obedience.

Perishable riches, false pleasures, fatal liberty of the world, I have done with you, you will no longer have any influence over my heart. This heart is dead to you

and you are dead to it. What do I say? This heart is no longer mine. O faithful Spouse, I place it in Thy hands; it has been made for Thee; it would merit annihilation did it withdraw from Thee. Deign, then, to take possession of it, to-day; reign therein so absolutely that nothing may enter, except with and by Thee. This heart is Thine; never restore it to me, I cannot answer for it, should it again fall into my hands. Place it in Thy Sacred Heart, that in that furnace of love, it may learn to love Thee; place therein all my affections, my desires, all my thoughts, my whole being!

Strengthen Thy work, support my steps, crown Thy gifts, preserve in me the dispositions, which Thy grace has given me! Add to all these favors, that Thou hast granted me, that which alone will crown them, the gift of final perseverance in the faithful observance of my vows, that is to say, Thy holy love for time and eternity. *Amen.*

A
RETREAT,

ARRANGED FOR EIGHT DAYS.

MEDITATION FOR THE EVE OF THE RETREAT.

First Day.

- First Meditation : On Creation.
Second “ On the End of Man.
 Conference : On the End of a Religious.
Third Meditation : On the End of a Christian.
 Consideration : On the Retreat and the Annual Con-
 fession. (App.)
Fourth Meditation : God our End.

Second Day.

- First Meditation : On Mortal Sin.
Second “ On Venial Sin.
 Conference : On Religious Vigilance.
Third Meditation : On Abuse of Grace.
 Consideration : On the principal Fruits of Retreat.
Fourth Meditation : On the Price of Grace.

Third Day.

- First Meditation : On Death.
Second “ On the Last Judgment.
 Conference : On the Vow of Chastity.
Third Meditation : On Hell.
 Consideration : On the Necessity of Self-Abasement.
Fourth Meditation : On Eternity.

Fourth Day.

- First Meditation : On Heaven.
Second “ On the Imitation of Jesus Christ.
 Conference : On the Vow of Poverty.
Third Meditation : On the Imitation of our Holy Found-
 ers.
 Consideration : On the Spirit of Humility.
Fourth Meditation : On Mortification.

Fifth Day.

- First Meditation : On Crosses and Pains of Mind.
Second “ On Abandonment to Divine Provi-
 dence.
 Conference : On the Vow of Obedience.
Third Meditation : On the Knowledge of Jesus Christ.
 Consideration : On Humility and Solid Virtue.
Fourth Meditation : On the Love of Jesus Christ.

Sixth Day.

- First Meditation : On Union with Jesus Christ.
Second “ On the Interior Life.
 Conference : On Prayer.
Third Meditation : On Silence.

Consideration : On Self-love and the Injury it does
the Soul.

Fourth Meditation : On Humility of Heart.

Seventh Day.

First Meditation : On Meekness of Spirit.

Second " On Mutual Love.

Conference : On the Spirit of the Visitation.

Third Meditation : On the Blessed Eucharist.

Consideration : On Exactitude in the Observances.

Fourth Meditation : On the Oblation of Jesus Christ.

Eighth Day.

First Meditation : On Perseverance.

Second " On the Reception of the Sacraments.

Conferences : On Religious Perfection.

Third Meditation : On Devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

Consideration : On the Engagements of the Religious Life.

Fourth Meditation : On Devotion to the Sacred Heart.

Act for the Renovation of Vows.

Meditation for the Morning after the Retreat.

RETREAT

FOR THE THREE DAYS PREVIOUS TO THE RENEWAL OF VOWS,
OR THE ANNIVERSARY OF PROFESSION.

For the Eve of the Three Days.

The Meditation for the Eve of the Retreat.

For the Morning of the First Day.

First Meditation : On the Grace of a Religious Vocation.
Second “ On the Advantages of the Religious
 life.
Conference : On the Spirit of the Visitation in par-
 ticular.

For the Afternoon of the First Day.

First Meditation : On the Engagements of the Religious Life
Second “ On the Abuse of Grace.
Conference : On Religious Vigilance.

For the Morning of the Second Day.

First Meditation : On the Love of Jesus Christ.
Second “ On Union with Jesus Christ.
Conference : On the Vow of Chastity.

For the Afternoon of the Second Day.

- First Meditation : On Mortification.
 Second “ On Abandonment to Divine Providence.
 Conference : On the Vow of Poverty.

For the Morning of the Third Day.

- First Meditation : On Humility of Heart.
 Second “ On Meekness of Spirit.
 Conference : On the Vow of Obedience.

For the Afternoon of the Third Day.

- First Meditation : On Perseverance.
 Second “ On Devotion to the Blessed Virgin.
 Conference : On the End of the Religious State.

For the Day of the Renovation of the Vows, or of the Profession.

- Conference : On Religious Perfection.
 Act for the Renovation of the Vows.

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